The METHODIST FAUN

By

Anne Parrish

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"And throughout all Eternity
I forgive you, you forgive me."

—William Blake

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"The Perennial Bachelor," etc.

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PART ONE

THE METHODIST FAUN

CHAPTER I

ALL through Sunday morning sausages and griddle cakes Mrs. Hunter and her son Clifford had argued as to whether he should come with her to the Good Will Union Service of the Methodist and Episcopal churches. Now and then she paused to gaze at the Sunday paper behind which her husband kept silence, but it was no use asking him to come, or even not to work in the garden while people were passing. For a mild, sweet-tempered man—and Elbert was that, about most things—he had the stubbornest streak that could be imagined, and their son had inherited it. As long as she told Clifford it was his duty to come with her, he was firm in refusing. But when she pleaded: "Please, dear, just this once because I want you to," he yielded.

He was in his old clothes, for he had meant to spend the morning in the woods, and as he changed he felt as he used to feel on the Sundays when he had reluctantly got-

ten into starched blouse and buttoned shoes to go to church with his mother and her father. He had never been allowed to miss a Sunday then. His grandfather had seen to that, and had filled Clifford's childhood with devils in red tights, saints in nightgowns, and the old Magician who had to be flattered, told over and over again that He was wonderful, and even then might lose His temper and speak through lightning, storm, and death.

When his white-bearded grandfather prayed aloud with closed eyes and shining, frightening face, Clifford had believed God must look like that. Grampa tried his hardest to make me a good Methodist, he thought now, remembering revival meetings, and his terror afterwards of the jealous God, smeared with blood of sacrifice, howling through thunder, riding on the whirlwind. In this bed under which he was kicking his sneakers he had lain with his face in the pillow and the covers pulled over his head, while God looked at him out of the dark with an eye of fire, or he had pressed his palms to his ears for fear the awful thing that happened to the infant Samuel might happen to him.

He remembered the night when he thought it had come. Something was calling to him in the darkness. He had borne it as long as he could, and then burst out screaming: "Mama! Papa!"

His father had come, for his mother was at prayer-

meeting with Grampa. He told Clifford it was only an owl that was calling, and carried him out into the sweet warm night, full of rustlings, cries of insects, and that sad hooting that did not frighten him after he knew it was an owl, like the little one he had found, its yellow eyes dazzled by daylight, sinking down softly and heavily, trying to hide in its billowing dead-leaf feathers. Clifford loved his father that night so much that it hurt, and though they had seldom really spoken to each other since, he had remembered.

He thought again of other nights in childhood, when he had been so frightened of God that he had stolen out of the house to get away from Him. Fireflies shone, red peonies, black in the starshine, shook dew on his feet. And he had run away, too, from the Sunday afternoons that Grampa and God had turned to lead. If it hadn't been for the woods, he couldn't have borne the glare from God's Sunday eye, that would have seen and punished a stolen glance into Tanglewood Tales, or the use of his Prang's non-poisonous water-colours.

He had had fun in the woods, being Robin Hood. He could enjoy the Monday cold roast beef, that he usually hated, by telling himself it was the deer he had shot with his bow and arrow. Or he stalked Indians, stopping to lay his ear to the earth. A waving fern turned into the feathers of a crouching brave; the rust-red lichens on

the rocks were blood stains, where he had fought desperate battles.

Schools of minnows hung in the clear brook over schools of shadow minnows, suddenly scattering, as he splashed among them, to hide under sprays of jewel-weed leaves that showered from the banks and turned silver beneath the water. Once he had found a frog sitting in an old strawberry-box, tipped up at the edge of the brook. He pretended it was an enchanted Prince, like the one in the Grimm's Fairy Tale Book, and worked hard making a puddled garden of muddy white violet plants and small white pebbles around it, while it sat motionless except for the heaving of its creamy stomach, its front legs wide apart, its eyes popping out of its head. He brought lettuce and bread for it next day, but the strawberry-box house was empty.

He brought other presents to the woods for certain trees that were especial friends. The apple-tree near the house had been a friend, until Grampa overheard him talking to it once, and found the slice of jelly-cake and the bunch of daisies Clifford had left in its crotch. Then Grampa had told him what happened to those who worshipped vain idols, and frightened him so he was sick.

The memories of acute, useless suffering still made him resentful, and he pushed them down. Those times were over, and what had been frightening was only boring now. The congregation shrieked and sobbed no

more, but collected funds for the parsonage sun-porch, sang at Get-Together Meetings, and ate. Good taste had tamed Mount Pleasant.

He pulled apart a pair of never-worn chamois gloves, decided against them, rammed them back into a drawer over-flowing with shirt-sleeves and ties, and glared sternly into the mirror before he fell downstairs in answer to his mother's summoning shrieks.

"Oh! Did you put on an *orange* tie?"

But it was too late to urge a change, although she gave her opinion as she climbed into the Ford beside him.

While she talked, he went on with his thoughts.

"—one of your nice dark blues would have been more suitable, to say the least," his mother said. He waited a moment. She seemed to be through, so he began.

"If we were going to church because of real religion I wouldn't mind ——"

"My goodness, are you still on *that?*"

"But you don't think that's what it is, do you? Mother, do you? We're going because other people are going, we live our whole lives to please other people ——"

"Don't drive in the puddles, Clifford."

"How many of the people in this place who are such wonderful Christians would be burned, or be thrown to the lions, for their religion? Would Mrs. Cater? Would Mrs. Johnson? Would Mr. McGrath?"

"Your grandfather would have."

Yes, and heaven help the lions, Clifford thought, going on aloud:

"Imagine the Pine Hill people in the time of the early Christians. Do you know what all the ladies would have been doing? They'd have been going to the temples to ask favours of—of the goddesses, and making fun of those crazy Christians in the Catacombs."

"How you talk!" said Mrs. Hunter, indulgently, not really listening, but pleased that he was with her, looking so nice except for that tie. "See, Miss King's daffys are in bloom! Don't tell Papa, it makes him feel bad when his aren't the first."

Sitting in the pew beside her, while she dealt out recognition to the congregation, smilingly knowing nods to Methodists, graciously welcoming bows to Episcopalians, stares to the socially-climbing Methodists who had left Mount Pleasant for Holy Trinity, and come back today, Clifford went on with his protests, but silently. Have any of them come because Christianity is burning in their breasts? Nothing is burning, there is nothing so beautiful and painful as fire—just solid lumps of respectability, he thought, looking scornfully at the collars stiffly propping the smug faces of Earl Mittendorf and Winfred Cater, ushers, young leaders in Christian Endeavour, and feeling comforted by his own soft collar, which was probably shocking everyone.

He must remember to repeat these ideas to Martha

Simpson, turning over music now at the organ, and looking as clean and fresh as if she had been made that morning, with her pink cheeks, her smooth hair, her gleaming eye-glasses, and the thin white cuffs and collar brightening her dark dress. She was cultured and broad-minded, too, the one person in Pine Hill he could have real conversations with. She would understand and agree, for although she taught Sunday school and played the church organ, she had laughingly admitted to him that it was more self-indulgence than piousness. "Because kiddies and music are two of the things I love best in the world."

He was fond of Martha, and knew she was fond of him, for she had often told him that when she first came to Pine Hill from Rockville, where her father had taught in the Seminary, she had missed the intellectually satisfying companionship of the teachers so much that she would have died if it hadn't been for him. He could imagine living quite happily with her and her father, in a beautifully-kept little home full of an atmosphere of culture and understanding. There would be books, always an open fire in winter, gay little impromptu suppers with talk and music. He had never been to a gay little impromptu supper, but with eggs and a chafing-dish it ought to be easy to give one. It might be very pleasant to be married to Martha some day. Not that he was in any hurry about it.

But except for Martha, there wasn't an individual in church, unless he counted Evie Davis, who worked with him in his father's photograph studio. She stood out from the others, with her vermilion lips and big pearl ear-rings, and little black dress that clung to her pretty figure as if it were wet. But he never could think of Evie as a real person.

Martha, still glowing from the surprise of seeing Clifford in church, began to play. Her feet rose and fell on the organ pedals, she pulled out vox angelica, pushed in grand diapason, pulled out tremolo, with no noticeable change in sound. Lifting her face and arching her wrists, like Saint Cecilia over the piano at home, she hoped that he was watching.

The congregation sang:

"O sometimes the shadows are deep,
And rough seems the path to the goal,
And sorrows, sometimes how they sweep
Like tempests down over the soul!"

"Sing, son, why don't you?"

"O then to the Rock let me fly,"

screamed the ladies,

"Let me fly"

grumbled Mr. Boles and Mr. Palmer deeply, while other gentlemen moved their mouths.

"To the Rock that is higher than I——"

I'll fly to the rocks this afternoon, all right, Clifford thought. The waterfall will be full, after this rain. He languidly accepted half the book his mother was flapping at him, permitting himself an intentional yawn and a cold half-smile, and followed the words as Mr. McGrath began to read.

"Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter."

God was always talking about His sheep. Clifford felt himself the only one in church who was not of the flock. The last time church had been real to him was when he was sixteen, and, afraid he was going insane because of the thoughts that came at night, had turned, in terror, to religion. He had even led in prayer on Wednesday evenings, crying with tears of ecstasy, "Come to Jesus!" Winfred Cater, who also led in prayer, had never achieved half so touching an effect, as Clifford was well aware. But that had not lasted long. It made him feel hot all over to remember it now, in his present detachment from God's sheep, that kept together because they were afraid to be alone, coming into the fold of the church to be close to each other, bleating prayers because

they wanted things, happiness, success, because they wanted to feel righteous, or to please God by telling Him, complacently, that they were miserable sinners. They didn't have to worry about the gentle Son or His Dove, but the old bearded Father had to be coaxed and cajoled.

Far down and faint Clifford felt a little frightened at having such ideas in church, but elated by them, too. He thought, I might as well face the fact that I'm different from other people. I'm sensitive, and that means suffering. I'm different, and that means loneliness.

CHAPTER II

WINFRED CATER bowed a young man and a girl into the pew across the aisle. The girl was beautiful, shining with the clear colour of spring flowers among the mud-coloured, dust-coloured clothes of the other people, Clifford thought, as she knelt, not content with the duck of the head with which most of the Episcopalians had greeted the God of Mount Pleasant.

He knew who they were, and his heart beat faster. Bill and Cathleen King, come back from abroad to stay with their aunt at the old King place where he had played with them when they were children. Mrs. Johnson had told his mother they were coming. Would they remember him?

They had asked him to a party once, and he had gone unwillingly, but he had a thrilling time until the excitement of Going to Jerusalem made him sick. He nearly died of shame, he thought all the children were laughing at him. His face scorched now, as he remembered. He had never wanted to see Bill and Cathleen again, but his mother, not understanding his agonies of self-consciousness, made him pay his party-call. It had been awful at first, but after he took them to the woods it had been bliss. That night he couldn't sleep. He planned tomor-

row to show them his secret cave on the hill by the waterfall; he would play with them every day. When his mother made him eat all his oatmeal he cried, for fear he would be too late, and they would have gone; and he ran all the way to their house. When he got there they hadn't had breakfast yet. He waited around a long time, but they hadn't come out.

Everything about them had always seemed different and bright. How many times, even lately, had he spoken of "Friends of mine, living abroad—Bill and Cathleen King." Not many people he knew had friends living abroad. But now he thought, they probably won't remember me at all. And besides, they probably think they're too wonderful to associate with anyone here.

But he thought they were wonderful, too.

He looked at Bill, and wished he had worn his chamois gloves. I don't care, he thought. I'm as good as you are, even if I never have been away from Pine Hill.

No, I'm not! I'm not!

This must all seem rather amusing to you, he said to Cathleen lightly, in his mind, as the weak quavering voice of old Mr. Wood cried "Ay-men!" or "Praise the Lord!" Do realize that I'm different! If we could only talk together, alone, you would know that I'm not like the others here.

She didn't look conceited, anyway. She had a beautiful expression. His eyes, meeting hers, glazed, and he

glared through her, in a fever of self-consciousness. But gradually he relaxed, and began seeing himself as she must see him. He couldn't help feeling that he stood out from the others. He saw his waving hair, a little long, the large soft collar and orange tie. He remembered having noticed in the mirror, as he tied it, that he had an expression of suffering. He intensified that.

He glanced again, and met an answering look so gentle and friendly that he caught his breath, wondering if love at first sight had ever really happened. I have never loved anyone, he thought, no one has ever loved me. Oh, mother and father. Simply biological. I mean real love. This isn't exactly my first sight of Cathleen, but it almost amounts to the same thing.

Martha Simpson had turned from the organ to listen to the sermon. She could see Clifford, and was glad she had sat up late the night before, embroidering the cuffs and collar that made her feel dainty and feminine. Should she ask Clifford casually, after church, to drop in for a talk with Papa this afternoon? Then she would serve four o'clock tea—there were chocolate crackers, and she would make salad sandwiches, and fix lemon slices the way they had them at Ye Olde Pine Hill Tea Room and Gifte Shoppe, with nicked edges, and cloves stuck in.

She wished she could see how that girl's coat was cut —the stranger in funny blue that Clifford kept looking at. It would be nice in navy, but that light colour was con-

spicuous for church, although of course some people didn't mind being looked at. That tie of Clifford's was conspicuous, too, but it was different with him, because he was artistic.

But the really conspicuous person, thought Martha, was that awful Evie Davis—she didn't look as if she had on a stitch of underclothes. It was hard on poor Clifford to work side by side with such an unrefined girl every day, just because his father was sorry for her. What's she doing here? Martha wondered. Coming to church is something new for Evie Davis.

While Martha looked at Evie, Evie looked at Clifford. She had seen him pass, and had pulled on her dress and hurried after him. She saw him every day in the studio, but that wasn't enough. Clifford! Clifford! her being called to him, adoring him. Secretly, now, or at night, lying beside her sleeping mother, not crying, but with tears seeping between closed lids, she could tell him that she was all his, that she longed to do something for him, to die for him. But when she talked to him in the studio she tried to seem indifferent, to be flippant about everything, for if he knew how she loved him it might make him feel badly—sorry for her, and impatient. She might lose the little she had.

She tried to make out the perfume of the stranger in front of her. It was grand when you could smell it, but you only could a little, when she moved. She hadn't used

enough. There wasn't any doubt about Evie's perfume. The advertisement in a movie magazine said it was used by famous stars of screen and stage, and that it was an old Egyptian secret that always worked its mystic spell. It was called Love Lure, and she had doused it on.

Clifford was looking at that girl. Evie hated her, she wanted her not to be there. She turned again towards Clifford, loving him.

CHAPTER III

THE ladies of the congregation were making Cathleen, usually dissatisfied with her clothes, feel exquisitely dressed. She and Bill had come to the Union Service because Aunt Edith, who was in bed with a cold, had feared it would be thought snobbish if nobody came from the Kings' house. They hadn't minded; they thought it might be funny. And they were certainly being noticed, which always pleased them, for they were both show-offs; they had never pretended they weren't.

"The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him," said the arch of Gothic lettering under which the Methodist minister was shouting. Her thoughts drifted from him to last Sunday, at sea; to the Sunday before, in Switzerland. Again she and Bill were climbing past the graveyard where wreaths of tin and bead pansies in the shadow of the church were grey with dew; were climbing up through pine-scented air until the ringing of bells in the valley was lost in the flow and splash of falling water. Under blue sky and looking towards blue mountains, they reached the meadows where blue gentians almost hid the tender grass. Their feet crushed herbs they did not know, giving fresh fragrance to the crystal-clear, torrent-cooled air, as they planned

their future together. All their plans were to be together, always. To write together, paint together, go on the stage together ——

The feeling that she was being stared at brought her back to the church, and she met the gaze of the too-handsome young man across the aisle. Mildly pleased, she looked away, imagined herself through his eyes, and then glanced back. He was no longer looking at her, but gloomily straight ahead. Her jaw trembled in a yawn, her eyes blurred with tears that splintered the Methodist minister in his white tie, and the butterscotch of the window behind him.

The young man's eyes returned to her, and she became cheerful, her expression grew softly, brightly entranced. She remembered who he was, now, though he had been in short trousers the last time she saw him. Clifford Hunter; and that was his mother overshadowing him, in a black satin toque with a rhinestone rabbit, small diamond screw ear-rings, a claret-coloured artificial orchid in her fur, and shining eye-glasses that leapt on their chain back to a box on her bosom when she pulled them out and let them go. It was she, unchanged, who made Cathleen sure about Clifford.

The glasses leapt. Cathleen looked at Bill to see if he had noticed. Of course he had. He was frowning at his hymnal, with his mouth pulled down in the way that meant he would burst into laughter at a touch.

How embarrassed the Methodist ladies must be by the brother who kept crying "Ay-men!" and "Praise the Lord!" Bill gave her a little kick, so she had to bend her head and cover her mouth with her palm.

Now Mr. Noyes was going to have his turn.

"The days of *mahn*—are but as *grahss:* for he flourisheth as a *flow*-er of the *field* ——"

His voice swung high, swung low, and the congregation answered, the Episcopalians in a quick gabble, the Methodists slower than usual, for they weren't going to be hurried by anybody:

"For as soon as the wind goeth over it, it is gone: and the place thereof shall know it no more."

Now they were settling to the sermon. The ladies pulled their skirts as tight as drums, to avoid wrinkles, the gentlemen folded their arms and sank into themselves. Cathleen glanced again at Clifford. He had gotten into such a self-conscious attitude, exactly like Aunt Edith listening to classical music, that she had to exchange comments with Bill.

She and her brother talked to each other without words. There was something so alive between them that she felt half dormant when he was away. And although it annoyed other people to be made to feel outsiders, they liked her more when she was with Bill, for she was funnier, more responsive, she could express herself better, knowing that he, always, would understand. She was all

alive. She was even better looking. He was the light that she was seen by.

Now her lips formed silently: "Clifford Hunter," and Bill nodded. Turning her face towards Mr. McGrath's sermon, she remembered more about Clifford.

He was the little prig in a ruffled collar and buttoned boots who came to one of our parties, and got so excited when we played some game that he was almost hysterical, and afterwards was sick. Then he came to see us, and told us about having signed the Anti-Cigarette pledge, and asked us to call on him.

She began to feel a warm, amused affection for him. She saw him again, a little boy in the woods, showing them where to find chestnuts; she remembered his triumph, his delight, when he led them through yellow leaves, heaped light and brittle, to the tree full of green-brown burrs, packed with close-fitting nuts, satin-smooth except for their little white woolly spires. Again the ivory nuts in their brown-ribbed skins split between her teeth, tasting of cold rain and earth-sweetness. His cheeks glowed, his pupils dilated, he was changed from the prim little boy who had come to call. But when Bill threw a stone to bring more burrs down, Clifford had flown at him, his face scarlet. "You might have hurt it!" he had burst out, nearly crying, and that was all he would say. And though he had made them take every chestnut,

they didn't want to play with him again. He was too queer.

He had been at the house next morning before they had breakfast, but they had stolen out and hidden in the grapery. After awhile they crept along the hemlock hedge and looked through, but he was gone.

But he came again, over and over again. Sometimes they played with him, but oftener they hid, for they never needed other children, they were happier by themselves. They always had been, they still were.

Memory after memory awoke, making her feel as she had felt last night, turning over the leaves of the old scrapbooks with Bill; looking, after so long, at the Babes in the Wood—a bright-berried bramble spray—the pictures from The Death and Burial of Cock Robin, that Aunt Edith had scolded them for cutting out of the book. The Beetle, the Owl, and the Fly.

"Who saw him die?
'I,' said the Fly ——"

CHAPTER IV

AUNT EDITH lowered the Sunday paper, and peered at her niece and nephew over her horn-rimmed spectacles and under the frill of the lace cap that she explained she knew was silly, while she listened to their report of the Union Service, which she also thought was silly. And when Cathleen mentioned Clifford Hunter, Aunt Edith said he was silly, too.

"What's the matter with him, Aunt Edith? He looked so funny, rather long hair, and a tie you wouldn't believe. Has he decided to be just very, very artistic?"

"Ar*tis*tic. *Hmp!* Worse than ar*tis*tic, just plain crazy. Goodness knows I haven't much use for that bossy Mrs. Hunter, but I can't help feeling sorry for her when I think of that ridiculous boy. He's always getting the Methodist ladies all stirred up. He planned a dance for one of their entertainments—there's an Evie Davis who works in his father's studio, pretty enough, but a common little thing, hard as nails. Very much smitten with the young gentleman, Mrs. Johnson says. Mrs. Johnson says Mrs. Hunter *high*ly disapproves of having her in the studio with her precious Clifford, but Mr. Hunter stood up to her for once and gave Evie work when her father was run over by a trolley car in Hamil-

ton. He used to play the piano in the Queen there when he wasn't drunk—when he was, too, I guess. Don't you remember Mrs. Davis? She used to come here to try to get subscriptions to magazines all the time, abso*lute*ly shiftless. Mrs. Noyes took up a collection to help her and the children after he was killed, and she spent it all in getting a permanent wave. There's a son who just loafs around—Mrs. Johnson says she knows for a fact he's a bootlegger, but that lady's apt to know a lot that isn't so. Still, I wouldn't put it past him. Then there's this Evie, and a lot of little boys always stealing cherries and chasing cats. What was I talking about?"

"Evie Davis and Clifford Hunter."

"Upsetting the ladies."

"Oh, yes, I remember. The dance Clifford wanted to give. He planned to have Evie be a nymph in green chiffon and bare legs, and he was to be a *faun,* if you please! He wanted to borrow the bear-skin rug Uncle William shot, he'd seen it on one of the shepherds in our Sunday school Christmas tableaux. A nymph and a faun at a Methodist entertainment!"

"Did they let him do it?"

"Goodness, no! They had a Martha Washington party instead—they all came here for wigs. They're always coming here for things, beg, beg, beg all the time. *I* wouldn't ask Mrs. Hunter for one strawberry for *our*

church, but she's always coming here for wigs and chickens and flowers."

"Oh, Bill, I'd forgotten the wigs! Let's go and look at them. Are they still on the upstairs porch, Aunt Edith?"

"Yes, but don't mess things up," said Aunt Edith, going back to the paper. That familiar warning was all they needed to put them into childhood again, as they stepped out on the tin of the porch floor, that rattled and boomed like humble stage thunder. There were the small old calf-skin trunks full of costumes that Aunt Edith always spoke of as wonderful until she tried to find something to use for church entertainments—crushed Roman pearls, flannel ermine, and repulsive matted wigs. Nothing looked changed since the days when they used to steer the house, turned into a ship, through the pale mauve foam of the lilac bushes below. This had been one of their hiding places from Clifford. Cathleen could almost hear him under the trees—"Yoo-hoo! Bee-yill! Cath-lee-heen!"—while she and Bill squatted on the porch, their hands over their mouths so that he shouldn't hear them giggling. They liked him well enough, but it was fun to hide.

Since her first breathing in of the smell of the house, the smell of matting, apples, old books, old wood, she had had again childhood's feeling of reaching peace and safety after restless broken brightness and blackness.

Then they had come from the west, where their father was dying, leaving behind them Jim Foo in his blue smock, the cactus bursting into flame-pink flower, the spring they must not go to because of rattlesnakes. Now, behind them was travel; their mother's death; then Switzerland for Bill's lungs, with the electric air, the beauty, the threat under which they lived, keying everything so high. And here was the old feeling of the interesting Kings come back, since Bill was well again, to peace and safety.

She and Bill leaned on the railing, its cracked paint warm with sun. They were so still that a bird flew across their faces with a soft whirr of wings; they saw the straw in its beak. A passion of love for the past was filling Cathleen, a passionate clinging, in the fast-rushing stream of time, to what seemed unchanged. The air was childhood's air, fragrant with earth and lilacs. She said to Bill, laying her cheek on her folded arms, while her eyes filled with tears, "I'm perfectly happy. I'll never be so happy again." For it was going past, going past. Other beautiful times would come, but never just this again.

"Let's take an old-fashioned Sunday afternoon walk," said Bill. "Wait till I get some cigarettes."

They went under light rain of willows past old houses, brick, and grey frame with wooden lace work, and new ones with sun-porches and tiled roofs, and, coming to Mr. Hunter's photograph studio, stopped to look in the show

case. Through her reflected self Cathleen saw a diapered baby, a little boy with comb-marked sweep of hair, a bridegroom, limp arm hanging, clutched by the bride. Then they went on into the meadow, and followed the stream to the woods. As they pushed through springing bushes, they caught sight of someone sitting under a tree, and Bill asked:

"Wasn't that the Methodist faun?"

"Who? Clifford Hunter? I didn't notice. Was it? Communing with nature? Did he see us?"

"I should say so. Such an attitude of unconsciousness!"

"Quite touching—and yet how pleased he must have been to be caught alone with his sorrows. I really quite love him, but don't let's look back. He probably doesn't remember us, anyway."

CHAPTER V

SPONGES of moss sucked wetly under Clifford's feet, making him think of the small book on mosses Martha Simpson's father had published long ago at his own expense—few publishers, he explained to Clifford, were interested in really scholarly works—and had given him, writing in it: "To my valued young friend, Clifford Hunter, with the Compliments of the Author." Clifford admired Mr. Simpson, and was usually eager to talk with him, but he had accepted Martha's invitation to tea this afternoon, after too long a pause, only because he could think of no excuse. He didn't feel like worthwhile conversation. He only wanted to realize the feeling that had come to him in church, of something wonderful about to happen. He hadn't really examined it yet. He hadn't wanted to, at dinner, with his mother talking, and his father carving roast beef. Something to do with Cathleen King.

He imagined her walking by his side, while he told her facts about moss from Mr. Simpson's book, and she glowed with interest.

"Don't let me bore you—*really?* You've always wanted to know? Well, you see in moss certain mother-cells don't produce spores, but become long spiral cells, known as elaters, that by their jerking, jumping movements when

first wet and then dry scatter the spores they touch. But this is probably ancient history to you? Why, really I don't lay claim to any unusual knowledge—you're too kind, Miss King ——"

Or did he call her Cathleen, as he had when they were children? Perhaps it would be better to say Miss King, and then she would laughingly exclaim: "Why the formality, *Mister* Hunter?"

Suppose he should meet her, here in the woods? Suppose she should speak to him as an old friend, and ask him to come and see her?

"Come home with you to afternoon tea? Why, that's very kind of you, Miss King—well, then, Cathleen—but unfortunately it happens that I promised Miss Simpson to go there for afternoon tea, or I should have been delighted." And he thought of ways to tell her how wonderful Martha and her father were, so that she should know what kind of people liked him. "I don't believe you have met them," he explained to his dream of Cathleen. "They came from Pennsylvania two years ago; Mr. Simpson held a position in Rockville Seminary. He is a scientist and author—perhaps you know his book? If not, I would be very happy to loan you the autographed copy he gave me. He's also been quite a traveller, like yourself. His daughter is a very cultured girl, very musical ——

"Cathleen, you're not jealous? Darling ridiculous girl, there's no one in the whole wide world like you ——"

Don't be a fool! She probably doesn't even remember you.

But she had looked at him this morning gently, kindly. The feeling that filled him at sight of her must mean something.

Had two people ever loved each other enough to be really together, with nothing hidden, nothing pretended, at rest in each other? Spirit answering flesh, flesh answering spirit? Had it ever happened, outside of books?

He gave a sudden leap, catching branches that swung him for a moment, then ran through his hands, so that he fell, sprinkled with silky scarlet tassels, to lie between roots outstretched like arms. He turned and pressed his face against the trunk.

Through what had seemed silence until he was still, he heard a dry rasping, and turned to see a snake, pale and swift from the spring change, move over the dead leaves through the hard push of young ferns. A shaft of sunlight fell with wounding brightness on the liquid green of horn-shaped skunk-cabbages that welled up out of the earth, sheath within sheath hiding something still, though he looked inside the tenderest inmost leaf. As always when he was alone and quiet, the never-revealed secret began to shine.

Then through the foaming faint yellow-green of the shadbushes he saw the Kings, and everything was shattered.

He became firmly unaware of their presence, became absorbed in the branches overhead. He didn't know whether the Kings saw him, and were waving, or whether Bill was just catching at a branch, and then Cathleen. He put up his hand to wave back, then in a frenzy of unsureness pretended he had just meant to smooth his hair. He brushed it back firmly, gave his head a shake, brushed it back again, and gazed upward.

When he was sure they were gone he could relax. He had been so still, so tense, that now he was trembling all over. The secret had withdrawn, the light was gone, and the shadowy girl from his side, but not for anything would he have missed seeing the living girl. From the shaken excitement of disappointment and relief he passed into a trance of Cathleen.

Rain began to fall, covering the foam and rush of the stream with breaking bubbles; the earth drank up the rain, the lichens swelled. His heart was swelling as he came to himself again.

Then he remembered he had promised to go to four o'clock tea at the Simpsons', and his wrist-watch said nearly five. And while he was longing to stay, wrapped in his mood, forgetting everything, as he was sure he would if his were the truly artistic temperament he sometimes thought it, his legs were running towards the Simpsons' as fast as they could go.

CHAPTER VI

MARTHA SIMPSON told herself Clifford wasn't coming. Wrapped in a damp napkin, the star-shaped sandwiches waited. She had not used the heart-shaped cutter, because that might look funny to him, sort of suggestive. On the window sill Joyce Kilmer's "Poems" lay open at "Trees," for she was crazy about nature, just like Clifford, and it would be something to talk about. And she had put a selection of music on the piano—Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words," MacDowell's "To a Wild Rose," "A Night in Venice" all dreamy splash and ripple, calling for crossed hands and arched wrists—in case he should ask for a tune in the twilight. But he wasn't coming.

She couldn't bear to look at the waiting tea-cart. She wished, she wished she had not invited him.

Her father sat by the window, in his black skull-cap, with the little crocheted shawl over his neatly brushed black coat. She had taken it off, because she wanted him to look nice for Clifford, but when the clouds covered the sun he said he was cold, and the shawl didn't matter now that there would be no one to see him but herself. His mouth was sucked in by age, his veined hands trembled.

Now and then he shook with silent laughter at some private joke, and a small tear squeezed out on his cheek.

He looked at the tea-cart, and asked who was coming; forgot, and asked again. No one *imagines* how patient I am with Papa, Martha thought, wanting to scream as she answered once more in a voice quieter than ever.

Mr. Simpson was glad Clifford Hunter was expected. No one else in Pine Hill had the sense to want to hear about all the things he knew, the places he had been. He had shipped to Rio once, working his passage. Who cared how? Monkeys had played in branches feathered with ferns and aerial roots of orchids. Languidly eating the pink shoots of the trumpet-tree the sloth hung head down, green-furred from a growth of algae. I must tell young what's-his-name about the sloth's green fur, if he ever turns up, but maybe Martha just imagines he's coming. She has notions.

It was getting late, the rainy day grew dark.

His cat leapt lightly to his lap, her paws delicately trod a circle on his cold bony knees before she curled, heavy and warm, paws tucked under. He comforted himself with her silky fur, with the deep purring under his hand, dreading the moment when her tight shut eyes would open wide, her head would go up, her ears would visibly listen, and she would leap down, stretch, stalk from the room with slightly waving tail.

Martha hated Pussy. She was always coming to her

father with complaints. *"That cat* brought in a strange lobster shell from someone's ash-can and left it right in the hall—there it was when Mrs. Johnson called—a smelly old lobster shell! Now it'll be all over Pine Hill what kind of a housekeeper *I* am!" *"Nice* Pussy!" Mr. Simpson murmured, shaking with laughter. "Poor Pussy! Was it a poor little Pussy, then?" And sometimes, when Martha complained of Pussy catching young robins, or yowling at night, Mr. Simpson would soliloquize, just audibly: "Poor little Pussy! No one cares for Pussy but the old man, and no one cares for the old man but Pussy. He's just a burden now. We're both in the way, Pussy, both in the way."

It wasn't fair of Papa, Martha thought.

But when Martha's lips were tight, as they were this afternoon, and her nose was pink, and that crease came between her eyes, it was better not to bother her. A very good girl, but touchy. He just stroked Pussy and made himself small in his chair. He wanted a handkerchief, but better not ask Martha for one. He might be able to manage by sniffing.

If Papa goes on making that noise, I'll go crazy, Martha thought, her nails cutting into her palms.

Then through the window she saw Clifford, and she gave a little pat to Papa's shoulder as she hurried to open the door.

He was full of breathless apologies, but she told him,

glowing, that she hadn't realized he was late. "I was reading 'The Man That Nobody Knows'—have you read it? I'd be very glad to loan it to you—and I'm just lost to the world when I get hold of a good book. *Time* means *noth*ing to me."

"Does it rain?" asked Mr. Simpson, pleased that the young man had come, and trying to be a good host.

They drank their tea, conscious that few others were doing that, at this hour, in Pine Hill. Papa dipped his chocolate cracker in his cup, and sucked. The noise made chills run up Martha's spine. What would Clifford think? "I suppose you've been off on some wonderful hike," she said loudly, and he answered, because he must speak Cathleen's name:

"Just a walk in the woods, and oddly enough I ran into two old friends, Bill and Cathleen King."

"That must have been very pleasant," Martha answered, her eyes on Papa, who was spilling now. She slaved and slaved to try to keep him nice, and did he care? Not that she wanted to be thanked—it was her duty, she knew, and she never yet had failed to do her duty—but he didn't even notice all her sacrifices for him. And Mr. Simpson, seeing her nose turn pinker, grew nervous, his hand shook so that the tea slopped over on his waistcoat. Better get her thinking of something else. He would tell about the sloth, that was interesting.

"I don't think I ever mentioned a sloth I once saw in the jungle ——"

That old sloth! He'd told Clifford about it over and over again, Martha thought. Yet she didn't want Papa to realize, and feel badly. After all, she couldn't have asked Clifford to come so often if she hadn't known that he considered Papa wonderful. And with Clifford here, after all her worrying, Papa became more and more the charming eccentric old scientist, whose days were made bright by the devotion of his daughter. Adjusting his cushion and filling his cup, she saw herself tender and womanly in Clifford's eyes. She imagined him saying beautiful understanding words to her that would make up for everything, asking if she realized she was a perfect saint in the way she sacrificed herself to her father. She would answer, and mean it, that it was just what anyone would do, and he would say, it's just what *you* would always do, Martha ——

"The mimicry hypothesis is a corollary of—uh—the Darwinian hypothesis," Papa was saying, in the droning voice that meant he would go on indefinitely. "Take some of the Brazilian butterflies, for instance. Their—uh—markings and colourings clearly imitate, if I may be allowed the loose use of the term, the markings and colourings of other species and families of nauseous and non-edible butterflies, though they themselves are extremely palatable to the—uh—birds of the jungle ——"

Clifford's attention wandered, his eyes stole to the painting he had given Mr. Simpson, that stood on the cabinet under Martha's Wallace Nutting coloured photographs. It was of a tree turning into a woman, white body swelling from grey-green trunk, leaves for hair, leaves held in lifted arms. What would Cathleen think of it? It seemed to him so good that he could hardly believe he had done it. He wished he hadn't given it away, for he couldn't imagine Cathleen ever seeing it here.

"Now, Papa, drink up your tea before it's stone cold," Martha urged. "Have another sandwich, Clifford, there's *noth*ing to them."

Mr. Simpson absent-mindedly gulped down his tea. "Of course in the jungle the trees are as full of living creatures as the floor of the forest," he went on. "Though it takes close observation to become aware of it, because uh—because—uh—because of the use of the cryptic colours, green and brown ——"

"The woods must be getting very pretty now," Martha said.

"They certainly are," Clifford agreed. "Yes, indeed!"

He glanced again at his painting.

"You're looking at my shell," said Mr. Simpson. "Nautilus pompilus, a gift from a fellow scientist. Take it out of the cabinet if you've a mind to."

Goodness, how did Papa's old shell get so dusty? Mar-

tha worried. What will Clifford think of me? "I dust and I dust," she told him, "and it looks exactly as if I *never* did. Look at that piano, you could write your name on it!"

She hoped mentioning the piano would make him beg for a little music, but she had to suggest it herself.

Rippling over the keyboard, tenderly pressing a minor chord, she imagined what it would be like if they were married; if, instead of going home, he just stayed ——

What was he thinking about? He looked dreamy and happy. Was it only her music, or could he be imagining the same thing she was? Could it have been telepathy that had made her think of it?

This brings me the ocean, Clifford thought determinedly, his fingers curved around the big silky shell that gleamed faintly pink and green. He remembered that a true artist is also a visionary, he tried to see himself with Cathleen by water, blue, green, and violet, like the post-card Aunt Ida had sent from Bermuda. But no picture came, and, giving up the effort, he sank again into the glow of feeling without thought.

Night in Venice splashed to silence. "I saw a sloth in the Brazilian jungle," Mr. Simpson began, waking from a doze.

Oh, Papa, don't, you'll drive Clifford home, Martha cried silently. Don't go, she cried silently to Clifford, far away with Cathleen.

CHAPTER VII

THE day after the Union Service Aunt Edith was well enough to be up on the step-ladder unhooking the crystals from the chandelier to wash them, when Cathleen saw the Reverend and Mrs. J. Ashton Noyes turning into the drive in the Ford coupé they whimsically called Araminta. Cathleen had to run with the pail of crystals, Bill with the ladder, while Aunt Edith flung herself on the sofa with head-cracking violence, because unless they found her ill they would think it so strange she had not been to church.

Bill did not come back, but Cathleen did, and, while Mrs. Noyes began an optimistic report to Aunt Edith of how *touchingly* pleased Mount Pleasant had been by the visit from Holy Trinity, she and Mr. Noyes paid compliments to Switzerland, country of sunshine, until they were interrupted by Mrs. Hunter, who came to inquire, for she knew if Miss King wasn't in church, something must be the matter.

The queen of the Methodists calling on the queen of the Episcopalians, Cathleen thought, going to the kitchen to help black Etta get tea. And Aunt Edith is showing Mrs. Hunter just the polite condescension the Queen of England might show the Queen of the Cannibal Islands.

Etta shared the family's feeling of superiority, and she and Cathleen had a scornfully amused conversation while she woke her little son Wendell, asleep under the table with his woolly head on yesterday's funny paper. "Min' now, boy, doan' trip wid 'at tray," she warned him, stuffing his arms, limp with sleep, into the sleeves of his white jacket, while Cathleen, still lightly scornful, got out the best tea-cloth to impress the callers.

When tea was over, Mrs. Hunter tore herself away from trying to hear, through Cathleen's remarks about the early daffodils, what Mrs. Noyes was saying Mrs. Johnson had said about Miss King, and what Miss King was saying back about Mrs. Johnson ("—but don't repeat this, Mrs. Noyes!" "Oh, no, I *never* repeat—"). Cathleen went with her to the door.

There sat Clifford in the Ford. He had half meant to go in, but when they arrived his mother had so taken it for granted he would not, that he had not the courage to face her astonishment. He had even tried to dissuade her from doing anything beyond inquiring at the door. She told him he was acting crazy.

He had come with reluctant eagerness, longing for and dreading a sight of Cathleen, and when she put out her hand and said: "Why, Clifford!" he felt as if his insides were turning over.

Poor little man, Cathleen thought, touched by his jade green tie protesting against everything Mrs. Hunter stood

for, by the small drop trembling from his nose that was red with cold. And she said that she couldn't bear the thought that he had waited in the rain, without any tea.

"Oh, he'd rather wait out in a cloudburst than face a tea-party! I tell him he's very foolish, he'd rather go off alone to the woods than enjoy himself with the young folks. This boy of mine is the greatest one for the woods. You must get him to show you some of the pretty places."

"Bill and I saw you in the woods yesterday, but you wouldn't look at us."

"Oh, I'm very sorry! I didn't see you—I mean, I hope you didn't ——"

"And books, too!" Mrs. Hunter went on, determined that Cathleen should realize how unusual Clifford was, for she never could persuade him to speak up and show for himself how bright and interesting he was. "He reads everything! When the rest of the young folks are tearing round amusing themselves, there sits Clifford with his nose in a book. He's a funny one! But still we think he's pretty nice." And you can see for yourself how good-looking he is, she thought, beaming at him fondly.

If mother only wouldn't, Clifford thought miserably, though he knew she talked that way because she wanted him to be appreciated. But what would Cathleen think?

"We oughtn't to keep C-Cathleen standing out here, mother."

C-Cathleen! Cathleen wanted to laugh, but she smiled instead. She knew she was beautiful to him, though when she deprecated her appearance in order to make them notice how superior it was, Mrs. Hunter begged her not to apologize, she understood how it was with sickness in the house.

As they drove home, Mrs. Hunter relaxed from her society voice, and said anxiously:

"Did you get awfully cold, dear? I *told* you to wear your overcoat, you know you ought to take care of yourself with your weak chest."

"Oh, I'm all right," he answered impatiently, trying to recapture Cathleen's voice saying: "Why, Clifford!" Slowly, sweetly. He said it over and over in his mind, trying to hear again the exact notes. I'm not fooling myself. She really did sound glad. "Why, Clifford!"

"Well, of course mothers are tiresome, dreadful things, but I don't know who's going to worry about keeping you well if I don't. I hated to keep you waiting so long, but I had to stay, since they went to the trouble of serving tea—of all the silly ideas, spoiling everyone's supper! You didn't miss a thing. That cake! They have that Etta that used to be at Browns', and she never was much of a hand at baking, but still you'd think Miss King or Cathleen would make the cake——"

The thudding of his heart was growing quieter. The swirling blur lifted to show a plantain leaf bowing in the rain at the edge of the Kings' drive, that he had stared at without realizing until she came out and said: "Why, Clifford!"

How had he looked to her? He had done what he could, in case they met. He had bathed and shaved and put on fresh underclothes, he had put a cluster of geranium in his buttonhole, and taken it out again for fear his mother would comment, and had tried different ties to the accompaniment of increasingly impatient shrieks from below. And she had seemed glad to see him. If only his mother hadn't boasted about him! If only he had been alone with Cathleen, then perhaps he could have thought of something striking to say, that she would be repeating now, glowing, as he was repeating: "Why, Clifford!"

"Whew! The air feels good!" his mother said. "They had an open fire fit to roast an ox, and then that girl's cigarettes! She's as bad as you are. I'm surprised Miss King allowed it, right in front of Mr. Noyes."

Of course Cathleen isn't thinking of me, Clifford told himself. I'm nothing to her, I never can be. But I can love her till I die, no one can stop me from doing that. "I did but see her passing by, And yet I love her till I die ——"

To love is the whole thing, is life. To love what you

can have without grabbing. The sky, this falling rain, you can love with all your might, and not even wish to hold. You don't ask the light to love you in return. Couldn't you love a person that same way?

"They had a little darky dressed up to bring in the tea-things," his mother told him. "Their Etta's Wendell. I'd as soon have an organ-grinder's monkey. I could hardly keep my face straight, but, as Mrs. Johnson says, let us be stylish or die in the attempt!"

Suddenly, startlingly, he was holding Cathleen in his arms.

"—— and half the dangles off the chandelier. Of course you can't blame Miss King when she's sick, though I must say she seemed pretty lively to me, but wouldn't you think that girl would see to it? I could never hold up my head again if anyone ever caught my parlour looking like that! I guess maybe I'm funny that way, but it seems to me ——"

He rose to the surface, found that he had made the right turn, and that his mother was still talking, and sank again.

I can feel pure outflowing love for her as I would for anything else that was perfect, a flower or something, with no more expectation of myself being realized, he thought, pleased and surprised by the nobility of his emotions. But all the same she did sound glad to see me. "Why, Clifford!"

"I guess Cathleen must've thought you were having a Saint Patrick celebration rather late in the day, with that green tie, Clifford; I noticed her looking at it."

He saw again the way she had smiled at him, her eyes really looking into his, not just sliding over the surface. But he must stop trembling.

"Stop at Weismullers', son, I want a can of baking powder."

"Why Clifford! I can't bear to think of you out in the rain—I saw you in the woods—Clifford!"

Waiting in front of the store, he looked at a world shining in a new light. He saw everything with such intensity that it nearly killed him. He looked away, anywhere; the rainy sky, Weismullers' window. Everything was the same, shining with that beautiful frightening light.

CHAPTER VIII

CLIFFORD had felt, at first, that his whole life would be radiant because of Cathleen, even if they never saw each other again. He lived on the memory of their meeting, saying to himself: one hour ago I saw her, at five minutes of five. And the next day: this time yesterday. In a week: last Monday I saw Cathleen. When emotional tension exhausted him, when lilac bushes were lilac bushes, instead of green and purple fountains rimmed with glory, when he could whisper to himself: "Cathleen," with no more response from tired senses than if he had whispered: "Mrs. Johnson," he despised himself, he worked to pump up love and suffering. But he was comforted by not sleeping well, for surely that proved his love was real.

Over and over again he passed her house, looking the other way, then stealing glances. Once he saw her breaking branches of lilac, and went home to try to write a poem. He decided to sublimate his love into poetry, and he got out his Keats to see how he had better begin. It was exciting to find that Keats had felt just as he was feeling now.

"Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,

Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!"

He called his poem "Our Lady of the Lilacs." It was not as good as Keats', but it cheered him, and he took it often from its hiding place beneath the paper of his underwear drawer, to reread it.

Once in the post office he saw Cathleen and Bill reading a letter, and heard her say: "Oh, I'm glad he's coming! I do love Charlie!" He pretended to be absorbed in his own mail, he frowned and bit his lip importantly over the list of new Victor records from The Hamilton Music Parlors, tensely ready to start with surprise when they spoke to him, wondering whether he had the nerve to ask them to come and have ice-cream sodas at the drug store. But when at last he looked up, they were gone.

His mother frequently urged him to call on Cathleen. "Why, she was your little sweetheart when you were kiddies! Just go once, out of politeness, they won't eat you." He tried saying, not aloud: "Well, guess I'll run over to Kings'," and looked at the telephone, rehearsing: "I don't suppose you're going to be in this evening?" The thought of really going paralyzed him, but because it seemed possible to his mother, he felt quite fond of her. He even thought he would like to talk things

over with her, and tried, one morning when she was making doughnuts.

"Mother, did you ever read much about Leonardo da Vinci? Or Keats, or anyone like that?"

"Some. Mrs. Noyes had a paper at the club—run out in the porch shed and get me the lard pail, like a good boy."

"Because they both seem to me to be sort of examples of sublimation ——"

"I can't hear you. Wait till you come in!"

"You know how important all the psychologists think sublimation is nowadays ——"

"Clifford! The lard pail with *lard* in it! That one's the lard pail with clothes-pins!"

Crazy boy, she thought, crossly, fondly, as Clifford's voice trailed in and out, punctuated by the flat slap of the screen door. "What do you mean by sublimation?"

"Well, now, look, suppose you love someone, and they don't love you, or even suppose you just *want* to love someone, and haven't anyone *to* love ——"

"Tc! Flour all over your tie!"

He rubbed it on his sweater sleeve, scowling. After a silence his mother said:

"Well, go on!"

"I didn't think you were interested."

"Now don't be touchy, honey, of course I'm interested, only I've *got* to get these doughnuts done." She cut

them out with a force that almost cut into the kneading board.

He leaned in the flour again. "Well, suppose you've got this love sort of churning round inside of you, it's going to knock you all to pieces, unless you let it out some way, poetry or painting or something—that's sublimation."

"Well, I suppose people who haven't anything to do have time for that kind of nonsense—oh, *Cliff*ord! Did I hurt you? You keep your feet in such funny places!"

She slid pale circles into the bubbling fat, and, watching them swell and turn delicately brown, he began to be hungry. "If people kept as busy as they ought to," his mother went on: "——Yes, take them out, there's the fork—they wouldn't have time for all this morbid nonsense. *I* never do."

Clifford ate a little brown ball that had been cut from the center of a doughnut, then another. They were crisp and light—delicious! "But *ev*eryone admits that sex is back of all creative work."

She wrinkled her face into an expression of disgust at the horrid word, and said: "Ugh!" before determinedly changing the subject.

"Get me the powdered sugar out of the cabinet, Clifford. Powdered. Powdered! Clifford, listen! *Not* the starch! *Not* the baking soda! Pow-dered *sug*-ar!"

What effect would it have if he should tell her of his

perfect love and sorrow? Take me, for instance, mother. I love Cathleen King, utterly, completely. No, it would be stronger just to say, I love Cathleen King. Cathleen will never love me. And yet I can thank God that I have to suffer this way, because I know I'm knowing the greatest thing in life. Don't feel sorry for me, mother. I'm not sorry for myself, I'm all right. A thing like this brings its own strength. I just wanted you to know, that's all ——

Probably it wouldn't have any effect at all. She would just think: another of Clifford's notions, or else laugh and be bracing. Older people always say how precious are the confidences of the young, but try to get them to pay any real attention! They just step on you or bump into you or tell you to do something.

"Don't eat any more hot holes, Clifford, and *if* you're going out take the lard pail with you."

The screen door slapped behind him. Twirling a doughnut on each forefinger, he wandered dreamily into the yard. Evie was sitting on the studio steps, in the sunshine, head back against the wall, eyes closed. He considered joining her, but decided against it, for he wanted to think about love. Strolling around the corner of the house, he found his father setting out seedlings, and squatted beside him, offering a doughnut. What does Papa think about things? he wondered. But he knew no way of finding out. He could more easily talk

to his mother, because she never paid much attention, she rushed away to get a jar of cherries, or to telephone someone. But Papa would listen, and then they would both be embarrassed.

He finished his doughnut, and began to chew the tender white end of a grass blade, following his father along the border without bothering to stand up. The sun was warm, he liked the smell of the puddled earth about the seedlings. An insect lit on his grass blade, powdery crimson, its folded Egyptian wings outlined with blue. "Look, Papa," he said, and his father, looking, answered: "Hmm! Pretty!" They squatted together, heads bent, lost in contemplation.

CHAPTER IX

EVIE DAVIS sat on the edge of the tumbled bed, her back to the apricot nightgown, the nearly empty box of chocolate peppermints, and the copy of "I Confess," that her mother had left. "I am beauty, I am love, I am compelling magnetism," she murmured, pulling on orange-pink silk stockings, and rolling them down over garters whose shirred silk had worn to show dingy elastic. *"Yes,* I am! I am irresistible to the one I love. You'd be surprised!"

The book on "How to Win Love" told her what to say aloud every morning on arising, but even while she tried to work her spells she couldn't help mocking herself.

The next thing was harder. She had to imagine that she was surrounded by the colour that is in the heart of a red rose. It sounded crazy, but there must be something in it, or they couldn't get a dollar and a half for the book.

She had been in Hamilton with Harold Felter until after two, at The Black Kats' Social Dance, and she felt half dead with sleepiness. She had thought perhaps it would be fun, but she so much wanted Clifford to be with her, always, that anyone else made her impatient, fretful. When Harold kissed her goodnight, as usual,

as any of the boys would have done, she had nearly taken his head off. Now he was mad. I should worry, she thought, stretching up her arms.

In the mirror fringed with her mother's loves—Ramon Navarro, Jack Gilbert, the Prince of Wales—she saw her beautiful body, naked except for the orange stockings, milk-white except where splashes of sunlight glowed. Much good it does me, she thought, drawing a vermilion Cupid's bow over her lips, screwing large pearls in her ears. Much good anything does me with Clifford. She stepped into flesh-pink silk, and pulled a fresh linen dress over her head.

There had been plenty of other boys who had filled her with thrilled excitement, although they had always been crazier about her than she had been about them. She had responded to the emotion of the moment, but she hadn't bothered about them in between times. Now they had become unreal to her; no one was real but Clifford.

There was nothing to do but try to get used to this scraped raw feeling inside her chest, that seemed to be there to stay. Sometimes she couldn't help hoping, a little at first, then more and more, until she was dizzy. But when she saw Clifford, she would know she had just been fooling herself again.

She tried to recapture the dream she had awakened from, caught a flash of beauty, lost it. "I am love," she

whispered, going into the kitchen, where her little brothers were having their breakfast of cold pork and coffee. Through the door she saw a mound in the folding bed in the parlour that meant her elder brother La Vergne was not yet up. Her mother, in bungalow apron, boudoir cap, and ostrich-fringed mules, looked up from a book to say there were butterfly buns in the bread-box.

"Say, Evie, I dreamt I was lookin' in the glass, and the dream book says that means lovers. Sounds kinda foolish, don't it? But that's what it says."

What was my dream? thought Evie. "You Donny, quit it! Lookut! My clean dress! I might've known nothing would stay clean in this place!"

"For shame, Evie! Slappin' your little brother! Mercy! S'a pity your family isn't good enough for you! Fuss, fuss, fuss! Mama, this ain't refined! Mama, that ain't ladylike! But of course it's very ladylike to lam your poor little brother—*Don*ny! Quit that noise! You'll wake up La Vergne, and then you *will* get sump'n to make you bawl!"

"The big bum ought to be up anyway. Lost his job again?"

"Him and they had a difference. They kep' puttin' on him and puttin' on him. Want a fried egg?"

"Haven't time. The old girl's just aching to have me late or something, so she can get Mr. Hunter to bounce me. She loves me like poison."

"Well, if it was me, I'd just *be* late, and if she said anything I'd just tell her what I thought of her. I seen her on the Hamilton trolley yesterday lookin' like she was suckin' a pickle. She had on strap shoes. I hope they hurt. Look, Evie, like this—strap, and then *bulge,* strap, and *bulge.* That conductor was on that was on the last time we went over, remember? The red-headed fella? He says, where's sister? I says, whadda y'mean, sister? That was my daughter was with me, I says. He says now *I'll* tell one! I simply couldn't make him believe we weren't sisters. He's a very cute fella."

"Oh, Mama!"

"Well, if I don't suit you, get another mother," Mrs. Davis answered tranquilly. "Look, Evie, I got this mawv rose at the Five and Ten, I think it'd look good under a hat brim, don't you?" She hung her boudoir cap on the corner of the framed print of "The Millennium," her favourite picture because she thought the flaxen-haired child in the nightgown looked like La Vergne when he was a baby. The lace of her cap veiled the lion.

"Whadda y'think?" she asked, as she tried on Evie's hat, with the rose tucked between it and her pretty hair.

"Oh, sure, you're America's Sweetheart in person, only I got to have my hat."

"I got me some slave bangles, too, at the Five and Ten, good as real. And they have all those diamond things for hats, like race horses."

"They're *awful*."

"Not refined enough for you, I suppose! No one's refined enough for you any more but a certain party I could mention."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"All right, I'll tell you what I'm talkin' about. I'm talkin' about Clifford Hunter."

"*Clif*-ford *Hun*-ter! *Clif*-ford *Hun*-ter! Ain't he sweet? See him comin' down the street! Oh, Percy, slap me on the wrist!"

"My goodness, Noble Davis, it must hurt to be as smart as you are!"

"Well, that's what La Vergne says about Clifford Hunter. Oh, Percy, slap me on the wrist! Look, this is the way La Vergne says he walks. Lookut!" Noble took a few mincing steps, arching his wrists, swaying from side to side. "Listen, here's Clifford talking. Oh, *girls,* I thought I should ex*pi*-ah!"

My family hasn't any refinement, Evie thought. No ideals. And Clifford's just all refinement and ideals. I wish I was different. I wish I was like that King girl—no, I don't, I'd rather die than be like her.

No use trying to be nice at home. Besides, no one but Clifford seemed real enough to make an effort for.

At the studio she put on the green smock she wore to try to please him, and then went out to pick some lilies of the valley to put in a tumbler on the counter. As she

lifted the fragrant bells and broad wet leaves to her face, her eyes filled with tears. She could bear the mess at home, the scrappy meals, the squabbling; but beauty had begun to hurt her.

CHAPTER X

CHARLIE TOWNSEND, a friend of Bill's at Oxford, now in an architect's office in New York, had visited the Kings, and was so struck with the drawing-room panelling, the fireplaces and stairway, that he wanted to include them in a series of articles on old country houses. Bill promised to have some photographs taken, and Aunt Edith had finally made him go that morning, with Cathleen, to make arrangements with the Hunter Studio.

They could see Mr. Hunter in his garden, a grey bulk rising and squatting, slowly, carefully, like a trained elephant. "He's a real gardener," Cathleen said. "Aunt Edith says she thinks he rather fancies himself as a quaint, lovable character pottering philosophically among his flowers and letting the world go by, when he ought to be trying to knock some of the nonsense out of Clifford, but that's because he won first prize for tulips at the flower show, and she only got second."

Evie Davis went to call him. "Isn't she lovely?" said Bill. "So warm and velvety."

"She's the one Mrs. Johnson says is so smitten with Clifford. Oh, Bill, these photographs!"

They had a good laugh at a group of the cast of a play

in Colonial costume—"Or something," Cathleen said, puzzled by combined panniers and pantalettes. Anyway, it was costume. The gentlemen were all looking surprised and unhappy at finding themselves in too small wigs with saucepan-handle tails. The Kings commented freely, and went on to the mottoes on the walls, reading them aloud, for they had not heard Clifford in the doorway.

"Keep Always the Treasured Thrill of the Bridal Hour."

"In Future Years You'll Want to Show Baby THAT FIRST TOOTH."

"Your Best Girl, Mother,
Your Truest Pal, Dad,
Or That Certain Wonderful Someone
Wants Your Photograph!"

Cathleen saw him first, covered with burrs and dead leaves, his hair sticking up in little horns, and turned red as he.

I know as well as you how ridiculous the things are, he wanted to say. Think you're so smart! He hated them for laughing; he loved his father, coming in. He wanted to hide him, to hide the studio, from them.

He had gone to the woods with the first light, but his mind had been full of Cathleen, so that he had seen nothing. Now he was ashamed of the way he looked, of his

old clothes, of his shoes stained with dew and dust. He envied Bill, whose clothes were old and shabby, but different, as if they had begun by looking like the illustrations of Our London Letter on Men's Fashions in Vanity Fair, that Clifford admired monthly.

But as he was about to escape, Cathleen found one of the photographs he had taken, a pine tree sculptural with snow, and at her soft cry he lingered.

"Have you any more like this?"

Outwardly indifferent, he flung some pictures on the counter. Delicate ferns against the base of an old tree massed with fungi; a water-lily on whose broad curled leaves round drops of water rested lightly, whose stem, traced for a little way, was lost in darkness.

"Bill, *look!* These trees after an ice-storm! And these cobwebs! Clifford, they're so beautiful they make me ache. You must take our pear tree when you come this afternoon."

"Oh, these!"

But he couldn't stay stiff and scowling.

"Oh, these, indeed! They're the most beautiful photographs I've ever seen."

"Clifford paints, too," said Mr. Hunter.

"Oh, well, I guess my paintings wouldn't interest them, Papa."

"Please let us see them!"

Laughing nervously, he pulled the canvases out from behind the heaving marble pillars of the drop scene.

"I never had a lesson in my life——"

"Of course I know they're not much good, but if you'll excuse—I call this Spring Zephyr. Of course I know they don't amount to anything, I just do them for the fun I get out of it——"

Cathleen looked with sinking heart at the neat Spring Zephyr in pale green, with floating red hair, flinging apple-blossoms; at the waterfall turning into a lady in white chiffon. "Look, Bill!" she cried, her voice a prayer for help, but Bill was leaving the polite lying to her. Mr. Hunter peered interestedly over his spectacles. She cast down her eyes, and, pretending to study the painting, saw that Clifford's hands were gripping the next canvas so hard that his nails were turning white. They're the treasures of his heart, she thought. Oh, dear, why is Bill here? For she never could lie convincingly in front of him.

She struggled, tactful, forced, and insincere. "Oh, that touch of blue is so valuable!" "Foliage is awfully hard to do, isn't it?" while Clifford, sick with humiliation, thought: if you'd just go away! If you'd stop being kind, and go——

Pushing his paintings out of sight, he could hear Bill and Cathleen making fun of them all the way home. He wanted to shut the Kings out of his mind, to prove to

himself how little he cared for what they thought. He despised Cathleen. Let her look down on him! Much difference it made to him!

He knew Evie was crazy about him. Not that that amounted to much, for in the past he had heard of her having affairs with half the boys in Pine Hill. But she was so warm and responsive that there was no strain in being with her; he didn't have to worry about what impression he was making, although he was always careful to be kind. *Noblesse oblige,* he thought. And although her adoration was given him so freely that it was almost worthless, it was balm now to his wounded pride to have her burst out about that stuck-up old Miss King, and that smart-aleck Bill, raging at whatever touched Cathleen, pouring out the bitterness that filled her against Cathleen, that she did not dare voice directly.

Mr. Hunter had gone back to his gardening. Clifford leaned against Evie, pressing his eyes into the curve of her neck, before he kissed her. She held him close, pouring her love about him, giving him what comfort she could as she received the savage kisses she tried not to believe were given her because of Cathleen.

CHAPTER XI

I WON'T go this afternoon, Clifford thought, and then: Yes, I will, too, or they might think they and their opinions mattered to me. He was cold to Cathleen, who followed him about, smoking more than she wanted, to impress him. Asking her please to stand out of the way, he buried himself under his black cloth.

If they expected him to admire their old house, they were going to be disappointed. Not a word of encouragement would he give them about their panelling, their stairway. He fought against the charm of the dim white walls, the faded plum-coloured chairs and sofas. The day had grown warm, but the marble fireplace over which bronze ladies in Turkish trousers lifted crystal-dripping candlesticks held ashes and embers. The art brick fireplaces in his home, and at the Simpsons', held witch brooms, Cape Cod firelighters from Ye Olde Pine Hill Tea Room and Gifte Shoppe—everything but fires.

Miss King was acting as if she expected him to blow up the house with his camera. At first she made him nervous, but Bill and Cathleen laughed, and he found himself laughing with them, unexpectedly, unwillingly at first. But they made him one of them, their eyes sought his. He had so seldom met anyone in laughter that the sudden

melting hurt. He and Evie laughed at people, bitterly, to show they didn't care. He and Martha agreed earnestly that life was very amusing, and were thankful for their sense of humour, although Martha's motto was "Laugh *with* people, not *at* them." But this!

And he felt, there could be a kind of love where you would laugh together, even laugh at each other, make fun of each other, not bothering to be polite, but loving each other so much that you could do anything. No anxious trying to be something else, no strain.

Relaxed, he said to Miss King, easily conversational as he moved a bowl of flowers into the picture: "I see that you favour the female forsythia."

She looked startled, but Bill and Cathleen laughed again, and Clifford laughed with them, excitedly, explaining that he knew about female forsythia from Mr. Simpson.

"He's a scientist, he wrote a book that he gave me. He knows all about everything, moss, and jungles. He's a great friend of mine; we have many a good old talk together."

"We met his daugher—yes, you remember, Bill. The pansy in eyeglasses who made the Mount Pleasant organ bleat like a sheep."

I ought to tell them what a truly delightful girl Martha is, thought Clifford. It's mean not to say how good she is to her father. But he laughed, instead.

He photographed the pear tree. "And now you must stay and have tea under it," Cathleen said. "If you don't mind petals in your cup."

"Or bugs," said Miss King.

"I'd be delighted——" Clifford began.

"Whoo! Whoo!" Miss King shouted suddenly, her attention caught by a violent wagging of tulips in the border. *"Micky!"*

A little old dog crawled out with eyes rolled sideward, flopped down heavily with a deep sigh, and fell asleep with his head affectionately on Cathleen's lap.

"Don't sit on that damp grass, Cathleen."

"I have to, Aunt Edith, to make a pillow for Micky."

How tender-hearted she is, Clifford thought.

He knew all about tea taken as a matter of course, whether you had company or not, from the English novels he got from the Hamilton Library; he had several times been to tea at the Simpsons', although Mr. Simpson's remarks made it plain that these were unusual treats; but he had never seen anything as effortless as this. When the ladies were to meet in the afternoon at his mother's, the morning was given to making cake and fancy sandwiches, "tea" was coffee, poured into cups in the kitchen. If it was winter, there would be five tight rosebuds in the green glass vase, and one, with asparagus fern, in the bud vase on the sectional bookcase. Men were never present, just the ladies and Mr. McGrath.

The rest of the garden poured away from the white fountain of the pear tree, freshness and fragrance foaming up from some deep source, each curving flower brimming with its secret, silent amid the loud deep humming of the bees.

Torn between bliss and nervousness, he struggled to converse. "Of course I *know* all about Freud, but ——" or: "Well, I've just glanced through it." And passing to music, he explained that he got a lot of pleasure out of the graphophone. "I mean Red Seal records, of course." He and Miss King commended Grand Opera, but Bill and Cathleen said they were uncultured and liked best the songs about being lonely and blue, longing for you. Earnestly Clifford decided that he, too, would like those best, although in a spirit of fun, not in the way his mother, and Martha, and he in his heart, liked "Just A-Wearyin' for You."

He accepted a second cup of tea, he lit a cigarette with easy self-possession. But his toes curled tensely. He began to boast about his love of poetry, his unconventionality, his indifference to the opinion of others, insisting that they listen so that he should not fall down and die of shyness and inferiority. And presently, warmed by their attention, he convinced himself. They thought he was interesting! Well, he was interesting! His voice flowed on, broken by excited laughter.

They like me! We're going to be friends!

Wordless criticisms passed from King to King, they withdrew from him slightly. Cathleen thought, he's impossible, conceited. She saw, through Bill's and Aunt Edith's eyes, everything just a little too much; his coat too belted and flapped and pocketed and buttoned; his colour too high; his eyelashes too long. But his shining face melted her, and because she knew he thought she was wonderful, because the pear tree was in bloom, and Bill was beside her, she answered him so sweetly that tears sprang to his eyes.

CHAPTER XII

BILL was making coffee in the French machine he had brought from London. It had already boiled over once, and Aunt Edith had carpeted the table and the porch floor with newspapers for fear that would happen again, and was giving advice above The Hamilton Star. Only Cathleen, sitting on the steps with an arm around Micky, saw Clifford coming across the lawn with the photographs, and waved a welcome.

"Quick! Quick! Look out! *Blow!*" Aunt Edith shrieked. The toppling pale brown foam subsided, quivering. Etta rushed to the kitchen door, shouting "Yas'm?" Micky burst into shrill barks. "You're just in time for a quiet cup of coffee," Cathleen told Clifford.

"Evening, Clifford."

"Good evening, Miss King, and it *is* a good evening, isn't it?"

Oh, why did I say that? It sounds so smug ——

"Hello, old fellow!" He patted Micky, who rolled back his eyes, and stopped thumping his tail. Oh, dear! Dogs were supposed to know at once if you were worth anything.

"Coffee, Clifford? Cigarette? Oh, the photographs are splendid! Look, Aunt Edith."

"Yes, very nice—*this* one's good. How's your mother?"

"Mother's very well, thank you, but too busy, as usual." He burnt his mouth, the spoon clattered in his saucer.

"Don't burn your mouth," advised Miss King. "I suppose Mrs. Hunter's getting ready for—what did Mrs. Johnson tell me?"

"A Spaghetti Supper. I've been painting a Venetian back drop all day."

"So you're a pillar of the church as well as your mother?"

"Oh, *no,* not a bit!" Can I make them understand how I feel? he wondered. Miss King frightened him, but Cathleen must be told. He rushed into a breathless explanation.

"In fact, I'm afraid I think that the church—that any organization, really—is just a kind of a result of what you might call the herd instinct. I—I have a kind of a feeling that each person ought to decide what's right for themselves. I guess you'd call me an agnostic, practically. I hope I haven't shocked you, but—that's—what ——"

Aunt Edith looked at him over the paper, and went back to her reading.

"I don't know how *you* feel," he said feebly to Bill and Cathleen, thinking: now I've made a fool of myself.

"I can't get very much wrought up about it one way or

the other," Bill answered. "Pitching into the church with loud emancipated cries would be too much like making a great hullabaloo over your courage in shooting at a harmless old straw-filled target. Look at Aunt Edith withering me!"

Clifford looked, laughing nervously.

"Moulded apple pudding," Miss King read aloud, musingly. "Hmm. Well, much as I regret missing any of this brilliant conversation, I think I'll go in."

"I *hope* I haven't shocked your aunt? Perhaps I shouldn't have said anything. I know the church means a lot to elderly ladies."

"I don't believe you've shaken her."

Clifford got up to put his cup on the table, and saw Miss King through the open window. She had lit one lamp, it painted a vivid picture in the dimness. Her spectacles were shining moons behind a bowl of the parrot tulips that had only taken second prize. The deep pink of their strange petals, encrusted with apple green, glowed against her black dress, against shadows. He heard the light ripping as she shuffled her cards for solitaire, the slur and slap as she laid them out. He came back to the steps, feeling young and unsure.

"Every night of her life," Cathleen murmured.

"I guess it's sort of reaction with me," said Clifford. "I got too much church when I was a kid. I don't know whether you recall my grandfather. He was quite a

character. I realize now he was a fine old patriarch, but he certainly made me miserable; it was church and prayers and the Bible all day long."

He was interested in his unhappy childhood, he luxuriated in Cathleen's soft sounds of sympathy. And after all, he had had ancestors, too. Confidence returned.

"I guess religion's a form of sublimation—you know what I mean—for lots of people. By the way, I was having quite a discussion about that the other day, and I got to wondering what you two thought about it. This person was telling me about a friend of theirs who was in love with someone who didn't love him—in fact, it was practically certain that this person didn't even guess that this man felt that way about her at all—and I maintained that the only thing in a case like that was sublimation. We had quite an argument! I was wondering what you two thought on the subject?"

The Kings held forth. Darkness deepened, they spoke to each other out of darkness.

It was raining when Clifford left, at midnight. "He'll be soaked," Cathleen remarked. "Poor little man! Isn't he fu——"

"Cathleen! Don't say funny and touching!"

"Why not, for goodness' sake?"

"Don't patronize him. He's more of a person than either of us. Hauling out our little ideas and our little emotions—pretty as anything, some of them—and

analyzing them and admiring them, and being understanding and disillusioned and articulate—oh, God, how articulate! Sometimes I think we haven't a real thing about us. We quiver prettily through life, and think of death as a drift of petals."

"Not you. That's a crack at me."

"But Clifford is real, at least part of him, really natural, really one with nature."

"But we love nature, too, Bill! I adore it!"

She wanted to cry, for she always needed reassurance, and Bill's words turned her into an empty shell.

"Oh, I know you thrill at a red tree in autumn, and vibrate to waterfalls, and laugh and cry at toadstools and harebells, because you're beauty-loving and sensitive and neurotic and self-conscious ——"

"Good gracious! If anyone was ever self-conscious, it's Clifford!"

"Only his Methodist half, that thinks it's so un-Methodist because it has substituted sublimation ——"

"*Poor* little man!"

"And creative force and so on for the other gods. That half of him is frantically self-conscious, self-improving, serious-minded. But I feel there's another part of him, rooted in darkness, and sometimes he must be torn in two."

"Poor ——"

"*Don't* say poor little man!"

"Goodness, Bill, you're cross tonight! You're the neurotic one. Well, maybe we both are." For she rather liked the idea of being neurotic. She knew she felt more intensely than most people, enjoyed until it was pain, suffered until it was pleasure. "After all, when you're the last of an old dying family ——"

"Dozens of cousins, and not so damn old a family."

"Just say that in front of Aunt Edith!"

"Don't start in trying to help Clifford, Cathleen. You're sorry for him, and you like him, but you'd get awfully sick of him. You could so easily decide to be his ideal, his inspiration, far above him, and reach down compassionate hands to help him as he struggled up towards you. But you're a nice girl, and if he came too close you'd give him a good hard push."

"I wouldn't be so mean!"

"It would be too easy to hurt him, because he's ready to adore you. All that talk about loving someone even though he knows she'll never love him ——"

"Bill, you're crazy!" But perhaps Bill's right, she thought. I won't see anything more of him than I can help, I wouldn't hurt the poor little man for anything. She suddenly smiled in the dark, feeling comforted.

CHAPTER XIII

CATHLEEN was mildly chagrined to find that her plans for keeping Clifford at a safe distance were unnecessary, for he did not try to come near her. He was afraid of Miss King, for, hotly remembering words meant to be brave, honest, and impressive, that seemed now only stilted and officious, he felt that he had insulted a lady in her own home. I won't push in where I'm not wanted, he decided. I'll wait till they call up, or something. He was slightly upset each time the telephone rang, but presently, although still telling himself that the one thing he wanted in life was to see Cathleen, he avoided a meeting. He no longer wanted to do anything, to speak or to be spoken to. He wanted to be left alone to live in his dream of Cathleen, in a remembered word, a look. Other people blurred the image, confused the sensation. An occasional glimpse of Cathleen disturbed him most of all.

She doesn't know the real me, he thought. Nobody does. When he was with people he never could be at his best, because he so desperately wanted to be. He felt as if he had been hustled on to a stage without a glance at his lines, in a company letter-perfect, before an audience ready to laugh or hiss at him.

He avoided everyone, pretending to gaze at a distant view, hurrying to the other side of the road. The Pine Hill people began to talk. Mrs. Johnson said she was sorry for Mrs. Hunter, and worried about Clifford, though when it came to saying he was losing his mind, she thought that was untrue and unkind. She had seen him in the woods when she took the girls of the Catbird Troop on a picnic, and he had acted very suspiciously, as if he wanted to avoid them, but she thought possibly there was some explanation. She wondered just how good it was for him to be thrown every day with that Evie Davis, for after all young men were young men. She wondered what it was he had on his mind.

Martha Simpson worried about Clifford, for he had stopped coming to see her. At her third telephone call—"Papa has missed his talks with you so much!"—he went one evening, and she greeted him brightly, for she thought it would be better not to act hurt. But the conversation became so vague, so full of dark hints of hopelessness from Clifford, and dramatic bursts of mirthless laughter, that she decided to speak out, and cried:

"Something's on your mind! 'Fess up, now! What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing."

"But I just *know* you're not happy!"

"Happy!" Clifford laughed again, so loudly and bitterly that he startled himself. "Is anyone happy?"

"Oh, Clifford, for shame! Remember what my beloved R. L. S. says:

'The world is so full of a number of things,
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings!' "

"No, but honestly, Martha, don't you feel sometimes that life is just a rather bad joke?"

"We all have our burdens, Clifford."

"Just take an example. There's a fellow I know—he happens to be an artist—who is in love with a girl, and she doesn't know it, and he never will tell her, because she is so far above him in every way. How can he be happy?"

Her heart began a long slow pounding. She let her hand slide nearer his, on the porch swing.

"He ought to tell her, Clifford. Maybe she loves him, too, but she can't tell him first."

"She wouldn't look at him. He'd lose the little he has. No, I tell him the only thing he can do is to sublimate his feelings—you know, like that book. I told you he was a musician, didn't I?"

"I think he ought to tell her, all the same. It seems to me the more a girl cares, the more apt she is to act very cold, unless she knows the man cares, too. Oh, tell him he must tell her!"

"I'm afraid it's too late," said Clifford deeply. He lit a cigarette. Martha drew back her hand.

He rather enjoyed his call, although it was disconcerting, when he was apologizing for having stayed so long, to have the church clock strike ten.

Well, it was lovely to have him confide in me, Martha thought, swinging between hope and depression. But what exactly had he confided? She planned things she could say to help him, next time, things learned through the brave endurance of her own troubles, that would show him, without mentioning names, that a woman could need love and reassurance, too, no matter how superior she was.

He saw Martha next day, as he went to the woods. It was Sunday, and she was walking to church with a Sunday school child clinging to each hand. A sweet, womanly girl, he thought, dodging around a corner, and nearly running into Mrs. Johnson hurrying to Sunday school. The hot day had brought out so many automobiles that he walked in the ditch, breathing in clouds of dust. Then he cut through Mr. Boles' meadow, grasshoppers whirring and popping up about him as he kicked through the daisies, thoughts whirring and popping up in his mind. Had Martha guessed he was speaking of himself last night? That was a funny look Mrs. Johnson had given him.

In the twilight of the woods he relaxed. Little plants broke through the strewn brown pine needles. He

squatted down, and let a small leaf, smooth, thick, and cool with sap, curl about his finger.

At his feet, across a drift of grey-brown skeleton leaves, lay a forked twig, covered with overlapping fungi, pure bright yellow, shaped like tiny shells. Picking it up, running a finger over its velvet softness, he had no past, no future. His tired mind grew still, his soul was sure.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. HUNTER thought Clifford was crazy, mooning away to the woods. If nature had been his hobby there might have been some sense to it, but he said he hated nature-lovers, and people who recognized bird-calls and knew the botanical names of plants. "What do you *do?*" she questioned. "Just spend your time sitting on rocks, catching cold?"

She wished he would get interested in some nice girl. That would wake him up!

Or it would be better still if he would come to church, and take part in the young folks' activities. But every time she made any such suggestion he just looked martyred.

She tried to talk it over with her husband, following him to the part of the garage where he kept his gardening tools.

"We've got to *do* something for the foolish boy. Everyone's noticing how queer he's acting, and he'll make himself sick, the way he skips his meals. I'm just about distracted! Couldn't you say something to him, Elbert? Just have a good frank talk, and get him to take an interest in something besides this everlasting going off by himself?"

Mr. Hunter tapped a baby chrysanthemum out of its pot, and gazed at the tangle of white rootlets helplessly.

"It isn't *right* for a young person to be so much alone. If only you'd come to church, Clifford might come, too, and then he'd get into things, I *know* he would."

But it was no use trying to get Mr. Hunter to church. There were stubborn streaks in him that nearly drove her crazy, and she felt that Clifford had inherited that stubbornness. Dreaminess, too. Her husband wouldn't hurry with his meals, for instance. She had watched him lift a spoonful half way, hold it, get it up to his mouth, almost, then put it down untouched, and start all over again, not even seeing that everyone else was through. Or he would start to say something, break off in the middle, stare unseeingly; take out his glasses; slowly, carefully put them on; just as slowly take them off, and put them in their case in his pocket. And when she cried: "Well, go on! What he said was ——?" he would have forgotten. And irritatingly he couldn't, or wouldn't, even tell what he had been thinking about in the meantime. Sometimes he acted as if he wasn't all there; and Clifford was getting exactly like him. Both of them were enough to drive a body wild.

But she would not give up fighting for Clifford's happiness. She told Mr. McGrath he must have a good frank talk with her son—"He'll take it, coming from a man,

where he won't from me,"—and sent Clifford to the parsonage with a basket of strawberries.

As he stopped the Ford a bulging pale pink mound wobbling slowly along the line of the parsonage strawberry bed straightened and revealed itself as Mrs. McGrath. She had a good look from behind a snowball bush, evidently thinking herself hidden, then disappeared into the kitchen, a box of strawberries in each hand. "—— coming now!" Clifford heard, as he stepped on the porch.

Little Mr. McGrath, pulling on his grey linen coat, hurried to unhook the screen door. "Good *morn*ing, stranger! Well, well, what beautiful berries! Thank you! Thank you! Just step in while Mrs. McG. empties the basket. Sit you down."

No use beating about the bush, Mr. McGrath thought. But he was not happy.

"I won't deny that I've been hoping for a little talk with you, Clifford. We don't see you as often as we'd like to. Now don't think I'm finding fault, but I wonder if you've thought how little trouble it would take to give a great big lot of happiness to that dear mother of yours? Don't think I'm blaming you for not attending church, my boy. I hope I'm as broad-minded as the next one. Even *I* know how tempting the lure of the open road can be on a nice Sunday morning, and I know what an out-of-doors sort of a chap *you* are. I even admit that

it's perfectly possible to worship God through nature—'Sermons in stones, and books in running brooks.' I don't blame you for preferring them to *my* sermons!"

"Oh, Mr. McGrath——"

"Oh, now, I just said that for fun, my boy! But, joking aside, one does owe something to the community, I think, if it's only one's example. It seems to me that perhaps the finest manifestation of Christianity is civic-mindedness. What about it?"

"Well, I——"

"We parsons aren't quite the old stick-in-the-muds we used to be, you know. I don't think you'll find the stress laid so much on narrow denominationalism nowadays, as on the good of the community. Now wouldn't you consider sharing your knowledge of the woods with some of the Sunday school lads, for instance?"

"Well, I'm afraid I'm not much——"

"Don't feel you must answer me now. Just think it over. And if you have any doubts or problems, I'll always be glad to go into them with you, my boy. There isn't anything you'd like to consult me about right now, is there? Well, any time, any time, now we've had our little talk, I'm sure we understand each other. Now I mustn't detain you. I'll just see if mother has emptied those berries."

He cooled off in the kitchen. I guess maybe I've

helped him a little, he thought anxiously. I tried to be a regular fellow.

He must remember some of the things he had said, and use them in a sermon—though perhaps in church they might sound a little too advanced.

He went back to pump Clifford's hand. For the second time they told each other that it was a beautiful day, and Clifford vaguely promised to come to church, to think about Sunday school boys—anything, to escape.

What got into Mr. McGrath? Clifford wondered, relaxing from embarrassed tension as he jolted along with the empty basket bouncing beside him. Did mother put him up to it? "Hey, Puppy! Get out of the way! Want me to run over you?" I came pretty near telling him right out what I thought about the whole business, but still I'm glad I held in, I guess it would have been too much like telling a baby there isn't any Santa Claus. It wouldn't have been any use talking philosophy to him, he wouldn't have understood. It wouldn't be any more use than attacking an old straw-filled target.

I suppose they look on me as a lost soul, he thought, beginning to feel pleasantly important. If he tackles me again, I'll just say, perfectly courteously: I appreciate your interest, Mr. McGrath, but just go and look at that pond full of spatterdocks over behind Mount Pleasant; couldn't anyone learn more from that than from any church built by men? Anyone could make up prayers

and sermons, but where is the man who could make the things in the mud and water? The snails and things? You make a spatterdock, Mr. McGrath, and I'll listen to all your sermons.

I guess no one ever thought of putting it that way to him.

When I say God, I'm afraid I don't mean what you do, Mr. McGrath. I'm afraid I don't believe in a personal God, but in some great creative force—"Morning, Mrs. Johnson." Do you really think that what made the solar system, and the ocean, and can turn a seed into a tree, is worrying because Clifford Hunter doesn't attend services at Mount Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Church?

Oh, well, it just means another fight with mother.

They think listening to that kind of talk can help me, or going to old Boles' Bible class. They don't understand a single thing.

No one understands, except Cathleen.

CHAPTER XV

CLIFFORD wanted to get a record of "All Alone" from The Hamilton Music Parlors, and "The Interpretation of Dreams," by Freud, from the Library. He tried to start without being caught by his mother, but at the sound of the car she burst through the kitchen door, crying: *"Cliff*ord! Yoo-hoo! Clifford! Going to town? I want an egg-whisk—better write them down, son,—and a basket of cantaloupes—be *sure* you poke the bottoms, you know how fussy Papa is about his melons —and a package of flesh Twink—certainly it isn't indecent, it's a sort of pink dye—and a package of Madame Louie Crimpers. Now, Clifford, don't be silly, of *course* you can ask for them. I never heard anything so affected!"

Going from one humiliating errand to another, he saw Bill and Cathleen, Bill in his London clothes strolling along unconcernedly with a large wire lampshade frame in one hand and a dripping pasteboard box in the other. And later he saw Cathleen waiting alone for the Pine Hill car, and with pounding heart offered her a lift.

"Clifford, I'll love you forever! The half past five car's always packed, and imagine trying to squeeze this lampshade in, not to mention these goldfish streaming

over everything. I'll back Aunt Edith against the world to think of crazy things for other people to bring back from Hamilton."

"Mother, too!"

"Your mother never sent for Freud, Clifford Hunter."

He had hoped she would see it. "Well, no, I must admit that I'm the member of our family most interested in the Freudian philosophy of life. Isn't Bill here? Can we stop for him anywhere?"

"Bill's on his way to New York. I came to see him off. He's got a job with a publishing firm. What am I going to do without him?"

For she felt that summer was over, though the labelled rose-bushes they were passing in the raw little gardens of Hamilton Terrace Addition were just coming into bloom; she almost felt life was over, since Bill was gone.

"I'm going to be terribly lonely. You must take pity on me sometimes, Clifford."

"I—I'd be only too pleased. I can sort of imagine how much you're going to miss him."

"We were saying last night that we hadn't seen you for ages. What have you been doing? Painting, I hope. You don't know how often I've thought of that Spring Zephyr of yours, it had so much imagination and such delicate colour."

"Oh, I put my foot through all those things you saw." I will, the minute I get home, he thought.

"Clifford, *why?* They were charming."

"They were awful, if you'll pardon the contradiction. They aren't the way I see things really, trees and things. They were just kind of pretty—horrible. I want to paint a tree the way I see it, or even a fern—oh, you'll think I'm crazy!"

"I won't. I'm fascinated. Go on."

"Well—I guess I *am* crazy—so it would make you—kind of—tremble ——"

"But I do understand. We're so patronizing about nature, aren't we? Miracles out of doors, stars beginning to shine, and the dew ——" she laughed, to show she knew she was being flowery. "And we don't even bother to look, we sit inside and don't care, talk about shad bones, and how tired Mrs. Johnson makes Aunt Edith."

He had thought of them, glamorous, talking of French literature and Chopin's nocturnes, and always aware of sunsets and the stars. He was disappointed and comforted.

"Poetry about nature, too. Graceful lyrics!" Cathleen went on.

"Maybe you'll think what I'm going to say is queer, but I think the best nature poetry is in the Old Testament. I guess you'll think it's peculiar of me to call that poetry, because of course it doesn't rhyme or anything ——"

"But it's marvellous poetry!"

"Before my grandfather died he nearly lost his eyesight, and I used to have to read the Bible aloud to him for hours. I hated it then, because I wanted to be out playing, but now I'm glad, because I learned so much of it by heart without meaning to. I guess my memory got kind of saturated with it. Of course I simply look at it as literature. I suppose most people would think that was sacrilegious of me. I never mentioned it to anyone before."

Already feeling a little better, she drew him out to talk about himself, for she found she was somewhat interested in having him interested in her. She had to remind him that he had passed the Pine Hill turning. Amused and cheered, she went into the house; then her spirits sank as she saw Wendell setting the table for two.

After dinner Aunt Edith began her game of patience, and Cathleen lay on the sofa, yawning until tears blurred the roses on the table beside her. She had gathered them yesterday, while Bill, bursting with conversation, had strolled beside her, wearing her lemon-yellow smock, a Sorrento fisherman's cap, and rubber boots. Aunt Edith, dropping rosebugs into a cocoa-tin of kerosene, had pleaded with him to get out of sight of the road.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Edith, but this rock shall fly from its stern base as soon as I, as long as there's a hope of Mrs. Johnson seeing me."

Now moths struck softly against the window screens,

Micky sighed in his sleep. One of the roses suddenly, silently spilled its petals.

Days passed, beautiful, boring. I'll write, Cathleen decided. Or I'll paint. Or I'll find peace and comfort in the garden. She began a novel that would show life's tragedy—comedy—futility. It had to be changed as often as she read a book that she liked, and she didn't get far. Sometime she would buy the paints she needed. She cut off the pods of the orange-pink poppies Aunt Edith was saving for seed. She sank into despair.

There wasn't must satisfaction in showing off to the Pine Hill people. She saw herself glamorous among them, but she couldn't feel sure that they did, except Clifford Hunter.

When Bill was with her he reassured and steadied her. He praised her, and he laughed at her. She was more interested in him than she was in herself. He was the only person she thought of without that exhausting other thought, what impression am I making?

Aunt Edith set out seedlings in the rain, and had to go to bed with bronchitis. For a week Cathleen nursed her. She had read her to sleep one afternoon, and sat by the bed really seeing the room that from familiarity had become almost invisible. Nothing was changed since she and Bill were children. The photograph of Aunt Edith and their father, little sister and brother hand in hand. Someone had coloured their cheeks pink, and the

ribbons on their round hats vivid blue. The photograph of Cathleen holding Bill, too fat a baby for her straining arms, sliding down into muslin ruffles.

Father had gone away, and here was Aunt Edith still. And Bill had gone away.

The small gold roses of the wall paper, the ruler propping the window open, were all unchanged. Only Aunt Edith was changed, old, as she lay there sleeping. Cathleen saw her hands crossed over creamy roses, and pushed the picture from her. But it must come, for her as for Aunt Edith. Would she, too, change into the old Miss King that each generation had provided to live at Pine Hill? What else could happen to her, stuck down here, never meeting anyone? Something stronger than thought made her see Clifford Hunter and the way he had looked at her.

Her hope of going to New York in the autumn faded. Bill, living contentedly with Charlie Townsend, no longer mentioned their plan of taking a little flat together. His letters, long and frequent at first, began to slacken. It was what always happened. When he went to school, and later to Oxford, he was homesick, and wrote despairingly. He hated everyone, he would never make friends. Cathleen would agonize over him, write long answers, spend her allowance on chocolate and books for him; and almost at once Bill would be intimate with half a dozen, be writing long accounts of what they did together, that

would dwindle as he grew more interested, while Cathleen would agonize over not being necessary to him.

She could tell now that his life was full. He loved her, but he wasn't lost without her.

Aunt Edith became convalescent and cross, and Etta, who had been an important angel, had a relapse into carelessness and touchiness; went to the front door wearing her kitchen apron, and answered: "What?" and: "No," without adding: "Miss Cathleen."

Unless something happens soon, I'll go crazy, Cathleen thought.

On the day he stayed to tea Clifford Hunter had offered to take her to the woods for maidenhair ferns. She decided to remind him of it when next they met at the post office. It would be a mild pleasure, but better than nothing.

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. CATER was complacent about Winfred's position in the Hamilton Bank. He was making good money, and gave her a certain amount every month. He bought her a vacuum cleaner and a wrist watch, and was reported by her as saying: "Nothing is too good for my little mother." He never forgot to wear a white carnation on Mother's Day. He didn't smoke.

Mrs. Mittendorf was complacent about Earl's popularity. He was president of the Wise Ys, and always getting up moonlight sing-songs, he was prominent in the Y. M. C. A., he had been class president at the State University, and, for all that, he wasn't goody-good; he was supposed to have been engaged to three girls there. According to his mother, any girl in Pine Hill would jump at him, but he said his mother was his sweetheart.

When the ladies met to play bridge or sew for the mission box, they boasted, filling Mrs. Hunter with envy. She boasted, too, about Clifford; his painting, his exclusiveness, his reading. But what were they against good money, mother-love, and popularity?

He's a thousand times better looking and more intelligent than those two conceited geese, she thought, while she urged him to try to be more like them. He could

be as popular and successful as anyone if he would only make a little effort. She couldn't bear the suspicion that people laughed at him because he was different. She dreamed of his mixing with the others, showing his superior qualities, becoming a leader. She urged him almost tearfully to have a good time with the young folks, and he said he'd rather die.

Through Mrs. Cater she heard that Mrs. Johnson had been told by Mrs. Noyes that Miss King had said Clifford was taking Cathleen to get ferns for the rockery, and she thought with delight that at last he was getting sociable. She would see to it that he had a fine time. She planned a picnic; a congenial crowd of young people. Ethel Brown, Earl, Winfred, and although Martha Simpson was older, she was a sweet girl, and would make an even number, with Clifford and Cathleen. Mrs. Hunter would put up lunch for everyone. She would bake a big devil-cake, and fry chickens.

Clifford, already wishing that he had never been born, that Cathleen had never come back to Pine Hill, that he had never mentioned ferns, was thrown into a frenzy by his mother's suggestions. By the time she gave up hope of the picnic, he was exhausted, she was hurt.

"I don't know what ails him!" she told her husband, hidden behind newspaper. "Why, if *I* was Clifford, I would say, Mama ——"

As her voice went on—if she had been Clifford, she

would have said: Thank you, Mama, that's *lovely* of you —not that she wanted gratitude, but *she* wouldn't have been able to help just saying it right out—did Clifford think it was just for her *own* fun she was planning to get all hot and tired baking rolls and cake and frying chicken?—Mr. Hunter's eyes crept along Mutt and Jeff falling backward in astonishment, or with question marks springing out of their heads, while he thought: it would be nice if people would let other people enjoy things their own way, or even be miserable their own way. But what was the use of saying anything?

Then Mrs. Hunter consoled herself with the idea that Clifford wanted to be alone with Cathleen; she became teasing, and urged him to take a box of candy and wear his Panama. He was raw before the time to start.

He would never have done anything except keep Cathleen in his heart for secret excitement, secret comfort, if she had not asked him to take her to the woods.

Sedately they walked across the fields, making conversation, calling to Micky, who trotted with a stick in his mouth, his eyes turned sideways. A blue cart in a farmyard made Cathleen begin to talk of France, with a French phrase now and then, which Clifford pretended to understand, and resented. But he was proud of her, too, for having travelled, for speaking French.

How I've been showing off! she thought, aware that she had given him the impression of adoring artists, poets,

and musicians, strewn over Europe, herself unconscious of their adoration. She almost always talked to people about themselves, or let them talk. This had been a bad lapse. "What have you been reading?" she asked Clifford.

While he breathlessly told her about Keats, she went on thinking of the years abroad, when she and Bill had been together. Because there was Bill, she was kind to Clifford. The difficult conversation became easy and wonderful for him. He was saying things he had only thought before, and she was understanding. She didn't think he was crazy! He was so excited he wanted to laugh, to cry, to fall down and kiss her feet.

"Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar ——?"

She knew that, too. She knew what he meant when he said it put him in mind of the woods—just sort of ——

She would not want the men she had known to see her with Clifford. But there were no such men in Pine Hill, so why shouldn't she be kind to this touching boy? Beside, a true aristocrat does as she likes.

Deep in the woods she cried out at the delicate glossy black stems and wave-edged leaflets of the maidenhair.

"Did you know that a single frond of Hart's-tongue fern carries over eighteen million spores?" Clifford called

to her from where he was digging. "Mr. Simpson told me. Mr. Simpson knows all about ferns. He says in the tropics ——"

It would be rather fun to be on a tropical island with Clifford, Cathleen thought. He would be better for it than any man she knew, except Bill. He would know about making fires, and catching fish, to be eaten bubbling-hot from flat pink shells. It would have to be a superior island, of course, with silvery springs, and bananas, and other tropical fruit, if there were any that weren't a combination of soft custard, needles, and turpentine. One of

"The little lazy isles where the trumpet-orchids blow."

And ridiculous as she knew she was being, she went on imagining his adoration of her qualities that would unfold in the difficult circumstances; her gallant courage, her sweetness, her humour, her unselfishness.

CHAPTER XVII

SHE leaned against a rock, breathing the fragrance of wild grape-blossom. The woods had grown strange, she felt lost and excited.

As he pushed towards her through a tangle of grape-vine, where a shaft of sunlight fell, a long spray of vine leaves dragged across Clifford's hair, the shadows of leaves spotted his flannel shirt and changed it into a leopard skin, and for a flash she saw goat feet and budding horns.

She began to tremble, she pushed back against the rock to keep from running. She wanted to run while the goat feet ran faster after her, to be caught in spite of swiftness, and held in spite of struggling, and thrown down among the ferns.

He saw her slim body against the rock, white fingers crushing moss and ferns, green leaf-reflections quivering like water over her startled face. Her voice suddenly crying: "Micky! Micky!" called Clifford back from a long long way.

Panic-stricken, she made herself think of things that would bring her again into this day, and hold her; that would wipe out the desire and fear she already was denying. A run in her stocking, where a bramble had

caught. The kitchen fragrant with hot strawberry jam, bubbling in pink foam, as she said goodbye to Aunt Edith——

Micky was rooting in the leaves, Clifford was politely helping her across a log, his hand beneath her elbow. Life was no longer strange, shaking. One could be coolly amused again. She was Cathleen King, exquisite, civilized, being kind to this little provincial Methodist.

But her legs were trembling so that when they came to the stile at the edge of the meadow she had to sit down.

Her hand shook a little as she held a cigarette for a light, but she was getting steady. She tried to think how to make the afternoon amusing in a letter to Bill, but langour melted her. She lay among the grasses, looking at the sky flowing with colour.

Clifford longed to have time stand still until he possessed this moment, whose radiance was sad because everything was passing. "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon." But the sun sank, the light of the moon welled up.

I will never forget this time until I die. I will make it all mine, because all of it is Cathleen, the whole world is Cathleen.

Through happiness came the thought, I am condemned to death. He could hardly bear the thought that she, too, was condemned. But when she went through the

gates of death she would make them beautiful and sweet. The words he was thinking burst out. "Are you afraid of death?"

The long deep pink buds of the wild roses, the loops of briar weighted with sea-shell petals, were stamped in her memory with the sound of his shaken exalted voice, the look of his eyes. "He's a little crazy," she thought uncomfortably.

That night she wrote to Bill.

"I went to the woods today with the Methodist Faun. He has been urging me for ages, so that I ran out of excuses, and besides, though I try to keep up a fiction with myself that I am perfectly happy with my books and flowers, all the mornings lately have stuck at quarter to eleven, and the afternoons at three. Anything for a change! I remembered your warning, and behaved exactly like an aunt, and I can assure you no false hopes were aroused.

"Clifford was full of gossip. I learned that the something-or-other fern has I've forgotten how many billion spores, and that Keats wrote very pleasing poetry. He's *killing,* poor little man, getting so excited! He would run ahead and then skip backward, facing me, talking about his soul. I blush to tell you that I was gracious to him. But I liked him in the woods. He found beautiful ferns (Aunt Edith says pessimistically that they won't stand being transplanted) and forgot all about being

cultured, and was nice, so happy and unselfconscious. But he went prim again on the way home, you never heard such broad A's, on all the wrong words, awhnd, and mawhn. We were *most* soulful, all sunsets and poetry and the after-life. I think he's touching, and a little crazy."

That night Clifford wrote:

"I am interested in receiving the particulars of your French lessons by mail." For if Jones had been able to address the waiter in perfect French after a few weeks' secret study, why might not Clifford address Cathleen?

Then he got out his Keats to read again words more beautiful because she, too, had read them.

"What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

Cathleen! Cathleen!

"—— yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!"

Because the afternoon had been too beautiful to have one moment blurred, he tried to write it down. I'll do a kind of prose poem, he decided. But words were not enough to tell how he loved Cathleen, who understood, who saw his hidden self, whose thoughts were his.

CHAPTER XVIII

CLIFFORD wanted to see Cathleen again, at once; to repeat perfection. She had to invent excuses, for he really had frightened her a little, but she invented so kindly that he was only disappointed, not discouraged. And his dream Cathleen was with him always; as he worked, as he walked, most of all as he fell asleep. He told her every wrong and foolish thing he had ever done or thought, and his explanations to her made him forgive himself; he told as happenings things that he wished had happened; he described sorrows, bravely endured, that he had imagined; he recounted his dreams, adding to them, to make them more Freudian and interesting, but never forgetting that she was a lady. And when he thought, as he sometimes did, that he was going insane, she reassured him. "No, Clifford, that's because you are an artist. You are more sensitive than ordinary people, you suffer more, but you will be happier, too, because you have the artist's intensity of feeling."

He wanted to make himself worthy of her. He got books she had spoken of, from the Hamilton Library, he smoked her kind of cigarette, he answered advertisements, although not too hopefully, about How to Become a Fascinating Conversationalist, and subscribed to an art

magazine that his mother had a hard time keeping out of sight. She had thought his copies of "Vanity Fair," with covers that often had to be hidden under "The Modern Priscilla," were bad enough, but they were nothing compared to this.

He bought a blue coat and cream-coloured trousers, although his old white trousers were perfectly good. His mother couldn't understand what had gotten into him. Acting as if he was made of money! Well, he had notions, and she could only hope he might outgrow them, although Papa still had his ups and downs, and Clifford was certainly a chip of the old block. If people just kept busy they wouldn't have time for notions. *I* haven't, she thought. Goodness, I don't have time to think about my*self!* I could get as blue as anyone if I stopped to think about my troubles, but when a body has as much to do as I have ——

His lack of appetite worried her. Once she said jokingly: "You must be in love!" and he was horrified to feel his face blazing. He ate almost nothing at meals. So much fuss was made that he began to be proud of it, but he stuffed secretly when he came in from the woods, late at night.

All the time he was working in the studio, posing the Burnham baby, posing Elsie Weismuller in her graduation dress, he was talking to his Cathleen, and she was understanding. "You must have moved the kodak, Earl

——" "If you'll have the Catbird Troop all here at two thirty on Friday, Mrs. Johnson——" "All right, Junior, here you are, a Brownie number two——" Then he turned to her, calling: Cathleen! He held her close, they spoke in broken whispers.

Evie Davis, beside him in the studio, was calling silently, too. Clifford, love me! I belong to you. Take me, love me.

Mrs. Johnson observed her, while the girls of the Catbird Troop were trying to stop giggling long enough to be photographed. "Not content with having half the boys in Pine Hill after her, though goodness knows why, she must needs be throwing herself at Clifford. He didn't seem to be paying much attention, but I have a notion that young gentleman is deeper than he lets on," she told Mrs. Mittendorf, who said: thank goodness, Earl had never looked at her. "Poor Mrs. Mittendorf!" Mrs. Johnson said to Mrs. Cater. "Everyone knows the state Earl was in over Evie. Well, none so blind as those who will not see!"

Clifford was sleeping badly. At first he had been mournfully gratified, then he began to be frightened. His daily life turned colourless and flat, lassitude drained him until each step, each word demanded effort. He dragged sleepily through the days, and at night lay awake, yet dreaming. Sometimes, sitting at the table, or waiting on a customer, he was lost for a timeless flash. Who

was he, where had he been? Searching their faces to see if they had noticed, he would fling himself into brisk talk, commend the pie, or explain the loading of a camera. If he was alone he would strike his hand against the wall to solidify a floating world.

After a night that had left him numb he went to the woods in the first greyness, dragging himself towards the waterfall. Its sound grew louder, drowning the sighing of the pines and drawing him upward.

Suddenly a leaf moved, and he was struck alive. Sensation grew so intense it was almost unbearable. Velvety, veined, notched, glistening, the shapes and textures of the leaves impressed him; he smelled earth, pines, and the cold running water; heard faint high notes that cried through the roar of the fall.

He dropped down on a ledge fringed with strong dark overhanging ferns and light upspringing ones that shook always in the wind from the waterfall. The rocks were patterned with cushions of dark moss and rosettes of lichens the grey-green of veeries' eggs. From the ledges fell drops, water welled from the crevices, so that the lower rocks seemed to quiver under the flowing film of water. The stream fell again into a deep pool with a force that drove up bubbles of air and turned the water opaque, then slid, smoothly swift, to lesser falls down through the pines.

Could someone you loved completely, who loved you

completely, give you the same feeling that the earth did, only humanly, bearably? This was too much, too much and not enough, he thought, biting dreamily into one of the bananas he had brought for breakfast.

Cathleen came to the studio that morning, with Bill, home for a few days. They wanted Clifford to hunt for Lost Brook with them, and his father urged him to go. He started out elated, expecting companionship to go on from that high moment among the ferns, even from where he had carried it in his thoughts. It was depressing, terrible, to find that he and she were strangers.

Desperately trying to recapture intimacy, he had to force himself, help himself by memories of imaginations. But sometimes Cathleen helped him, and when moments of perfection did come through, they were so much better than anything he had been able to invent that they shocked him with their reality.

They planned another walk for the next time Bill came home. But on the Saturday he was expected he went instead to his new friends the Clarks. Then he went to them again. His letters, short and few, were full of the Clarks. First Louis and Elise, then just Elise. He wanted Cathleen and Elise to know each other.

Cathleen knew what was happening, but she pushed it away, she would not look at it. Trying to forget, she turned to Clifford.

The pleasant part of Bill's picture returned to her.

"His ideal, his inspiration, far above him, reaching down compassionate hands——" She was another blesséd Damozel, leaning out; she could feel, as she looked at Clifford, that

"The wonder had not yet quite gone
From that still look of hers."

She said to herself, I only want to help him.

Clifford, too, thought of her as the blesséd Damozel when he found the poem in one of the books she lent him. It was the first he turned to, for it bulged slightly over pressed columbine, and a pencilled C.K. showed that she approved. He read:

"We two will live at once, one life;
And peace shall be with us."

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. HUNTER made reluctant Clifford carry a cake to Miss King as an offering to the Lawn Supper for the Bishop's Babies, because she intended asking for the Episcopal tissue-paper cherry blossoms and Chinese lanterns for the Methodist Evening in Old Japan. The icing was still sticky, and it had to be carried just so.

He found Cathleen by the lily-pool in the garden. She had been cutting out dead leaves; yellow-spotted green discs and dim red rubbery stems lay on the grass beside her, her arms and hands were as wet and cold as a nixie's.

Part of the pool was covered with lily-leaves crowding together so that they turned each other up, showing pink linings. A trembling jet of water fell back into the space she had cleared, and spread into light-rimmed circles where bubbles formed, floated, broke. Closed water-lilies, some on the water, some lifted strongly above it, rocked lightly, tiny gauze-winged insects quivered above them.

When she turned to him he saw that she was crying.

"Please excuse me, Clifford. I've just had a letter to say Bill's going to be married."

He wanted to comfort her, but what could he say?

"I'm glad for Bill. I do want him to be happy. Only I don't know how I'm going to live without him."

For, loving her, thinking things would be the same, Bill was gone. She had lost him, everything was over.

She could not bear the physical pain of loneliness and jealousy in silence any more. Fireflies began to shine through air drenched with the scent of white tobacco flowers, and in the growing darkness Clifford was nothing but vague sympathy. Talking to him was like talking to Micky. But he thought she was confiding in him because he was himself. He listened with all his heart, trying not to notice the mosquitoes, and when he did have to slap, slapping with as little smack as possible.

He spent the night under her window, because she had been hurt. When she was no longer with him he could have comforted her; the words came rushing.

Perhaps her unhappiness would really bring them together. For she had seemed to need him. Perhaps at last they would really meet, even if it was only to part. Under stars that trembled, sweeping and crowding, he imagined them fused in an ecstasy of pain that made happiness a light and surface thing. They were saying goodbye forever, they did not speak, because the barriers of their bodies were broken through, they needed no words, they were one. He felt her pain, as she felt his, with an intensity that would sustain them through the rest of their separated days, days that would be light and drifting as ashes.

The night must be nearly over, he thought, stretching his cramped body, and peering at his wrist-watch in the moonlight. Not quite one o'clock.

Gazing up, he dared to think of the distance from star to star, the limitlessness of space. He tried to imagine the sun. Heaving, whirling waves, spray of living flame, falling back in burning rain, filling even this darkness with fire. And the center, from which everything streamed, was a sleeping girl. The stars swept around her. "A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars."

He looked at his watch again. Twenty minutes past. But he would stay all night if it killed him. He smothered a sneeze.

He slept and woke and slept, through a night that seemed endless, longing to give up and go home, but forcing himself to remain; hoping and fearing that she should find out what he was doing.

He woke again, aching, in the earliest light. Everything was still, more still than in the depth of night. Even the creatures that had pattered and rustled lightly in the dark were asleep. Only, from farm to farm, the cocks were crowing.

As he went stiffly home the leaves of the mullein and dock plants along the meadow edge moved in a slight slow rhythm, the earth was heaving a little.

CHAPTER XX

BILL brought Elise and her brother Louis to Pine Hill, and Cathleen, between unhappiness and helping Aunt Edith, had no time or thoughts for Clifford.

Bill and Elise had evidently decided she was not to be hurt, or to be allowed to feel out of things. They included her, they were wonderful to her, until she could have screamed. But it wasn't Bill any more, it was a man in a trance. She had to explain things to him. It was incredible.

Elise was lovely, with eyes that were full of dreams even when Cathleen was sure she was thinking of nothing. She would sit with her still hands folded, seldom speaking; a little smile, gentle and shy, on her parted lips. Cathleen thought she looked like an angel and was utterly stupid. It made her wild to see Bill looking always to Elise for appreciation, throwing away on her his always-before so critical self.

Whether her quality was stupidity or serenity, Elise, in her gentle silence, gave no clue. But she wrapped Bill in peace until there was no tension, there were no twitching nerves, no tearing thoughts, nothing but a flood of pure love that he poured out to her. It did not matter what they said to each other, there was a sound in their

voices, a current running beneath. And Cathleen gave them phrases of love and understanding torn out of herself, that left her depleted, with only enough courage to cover her wounds with words.

Sometimes she tried to make Bill talk in the old way, although she knew he was longing to get away to Elise, and would stay with her because he didn't want her to realize it. Sometimes her own Bill called through, counting on her, as he always had, and then, though she strained to be herself, she could not; she was hard, falsely bright, hurting him. But afterwards Elise would comfort him.

She could never tell him things that mattered again, because he might tell Elise. She could never console herself for every shortcoming, every failure, by thinking that Bill, the most wonderful person in the world, loved her best.

She agreed with everyone about how splendid it was. No one but herself should question his choice. She agreed, smiling, with all the people who said, as if she might not have thought of it: "You'll miss your brother!"

She felt she could not have borne it without Louis Clark. He was so good-looking, his voice was so caressing, he evidently thought she was wonderful. When he was with her she was thawed from her frozen wretchedness.

They were together almost constantly. In the garden where the glossy yellow-green buds of the dahlias had

opened into loose rosettes of flame-coloured velvet; and the seat beneath the pear-tree was no longer safe because of the falling yellow pears. Or she sat beside him in his big French car, with Bill and Elise behind. They often passed Clifford in the old Ford. She'll be delighted to come out in this with me, after that, he thought bitterly.

Once, going through the meadow, he saw Cathleen and that man under the willows by the brook. Her shade hat, the tea-basket, and another basket, leaf-lined, and full of rosy yellow peaches, lay on the grass that the afternoon sun had turned golden green. Little wild flowers, purple and yellow, were pure transparent colour against the long light. Cathleen was washing teacups in the brook, her white dress and bare honey-coloured arms patterned with sunlight and waving shadows. That man was lounging against a willow, smoking. Clifford wanted to get past without being seen, but she called to him.

"Hello, Clifford! Mr. Clark, Mr. Hunter. Have a peach?"

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Clark. No, thank you, I have to hurry along."

"Are you going to the woods? If you see our brother and sister, tell them it's time to go, will you?"

He went on, heard the man say something, heard them both laugh. I guess they're laughing at me, he thought. Let them! Much I care!

He could see her lovely face looking at that man. Was

this the girl who had cried beside the lily-pool? Well, she's been easily consoled, he thought scornfully.

On his way home he stopped at the drug-store. Ethel Brown was having an icecream soda, and talking to Fred behind the counter. "I think it would be the sweetest thing if they had a double wedding!" she said. Clifford looked at her from the magazine stand. She looks as if she was sitting on a couple of ostrich eggs, he thought.

"They were in here for cigarettes this afternoon," Fred answered. "The way they were acting together made me feel quite mushy."

Clifford took a copy of "The New Yorker," and rang up the sale. Then he climbed on a stool. "Chocolate nut sundae, Fred."

"Hello, there, Clifford Hunter! Fred and I were talking about Cathleen King and that man that's visiting them. He's the best looking thing! Have you seen him? And *cu-razy* about her. Mrs. Johnson says he has oodles of money, too—not that that would make any difference if you were in love with someone. Honestly, it gives me a thrill just to see them together!" She gave a little bounce.

Clifford turned over the pages of his magazine, smiling coldly.

"Well, sir, when they were in here today, I said to myself, it won't be long now. I tell you, seeing those lovey-dovey looks made me feel quite lonesome and blue," Fred said sentimentally. "How about you, Cliff?"

"I'm afraid I'm very peculiar, but I don't seem able to work up much interest in the affair."

At supper that evening Mrs. Hunter commented on Mr. Clark's devotion to Cathleen. "That young man at Kings' certainly seems smitten. Well, they always say one wedding makes another. I guess Cathleen'll be doing very well for herself if she lands him, Mrs. Johnson says he's very wealthy. Did you know the Kings had a little party for the Clarks? I think it was kind of funny they didn't ask you, son. I met Cathleen and that Mr. Clark at the post office, and Cathleen said—through, Papa? Clifford, you never touched your nice salmon! Well, I guess this watermelon ought to taste good, a hot night like this. I just feel like a watermelon. I hope it's better than the last one, Papa."

She hauled out eyeglass chain, perched eyeglasses on nose, peered forward anxiously, while Mr. Hunter rose and thrust his carving knife into the watermelon. Clifford's eyes were fixed on the green rind, coldly beaded with moisture.

"I do hope it's good, Elbert! I told that man—does it cut ripe?"

The two halves split apart with a light tearing sound, the deep pink center spilled a few flat dark seeds. Rounds were silently lifted to plates, silently tasted. Then Mrs. Hunter sighed relievedly. "That's a very good melon, Papa—hm?"

In a casual voice Clifford asked:

"Cathleen said? Not that I imagine it was anything of world-shaking importance!"

"Hm? Not what? What are you talking about, son?"

"You said Cathleen said——"

"Oh, I said all you young folks ought to have a picnic while their houseguests were on, I said you knew lots of pretty places you'd be glad to take them to, and she said that would be very nice."

He went out to the yard, where heat had split open the plums, and petals kept spilling from his father's roses, though the air was still.

If he's the right man for her, I'm *glad,* he told himself. I only want her to be happy.

But the words meant nothing to him.

The nobility of sacrifice! he thought, suddenly bitter. It's all a bluff. No one gives up anything he wants unless he has to.

I suppose she thinks I put mother up to suggesting that they take me with them on a picnic. Maybe she's even kind enough to be sorry for me. What do I care? It's all right with me. If she doesn't want me, I certainly don't want her.

I'm good enough for her when there's no one else, but when she has friends from New York, it's different. Well, that suits me all right!

If she was occupied, so would he be. He could be

absorbed, too. He decided to have a delightful comradeship with his mother, and suggested to her, fanning on the porch, that he and she go to the movies in Hamilton.

"Well, but why didn't you speak of it before, Clifford? It seems such a crazy notion, a hot night like this."

"It's a Harold Lloyd."

"Well, I do like Harold Lloyd. You can always be sure it's going to be clean fun. But it's so hot. Suppose a thunder storm comes up, how about the windows?"

"Papa'll be here."

"Why don't you go over to the Kings' and ask them if they don't want to go, Dutch treat?"

"I don't *want* to go with the Kings!"

"Well, all right, all right! Only it seems so kind of crazy, all of a sudden, this way."

While she gave Mr. Hunter his orders, and telephoned Mrs. Cater to say she'd be away if Mrs. Cater telephoned her, Clifford changed into his new cream-coloured trousers and a silk shirt, for the Kings might be at the movies, too. Not that it would make any difference to him.

His mother gasped that it was hot, between reading each title to him. After the pictures he suggested ice-cream.

"Well, I don't know—it's simply stifling! Wouldn't it be more sensible just to go home? Whoo! I thought I'd die in that stuffy place."

"It'll cool you off."

In The Sugar Bowl he tried earnestly to make her look on the evening as something light-heartedly humorous. A man with a wet face and rolled up shirt sleeves brought them icewater, and deprecatingly made his little joke: "Think we'll have frost tonight?" But he got no response from Mrs. Hunter.

"How about a fresh fruit sundae, mother?"

"*Thirty* cents, Clifford!"

"This is my party."

"Well, Mr. Millionaire ——!"

"Two fresh fruit sundaes, please. What kind, mother?"

"Oh, I don't know. Let's see. Really, I hardly care for anything—you go ahead and have whatever you like while I just sip my icewater. Oh, well, fresh pineapple, I guess."

But they only had fresh peach, so Mrs. Hunter took that, looking injured, although she really liked it better. She ate disapprovingly, small bits from the tip of the spoon.

"Clifford, I think the whipped cream has turned a little. No, go ahead, but be just a little careful. Clifford! The man didn't serve any saltines with our order, and he served them to those other people—not that I *care,* only it's foolish of you to let them take advantage of you ——"

He saw himself hot and glistening, in the mirror, and felt too tired and discouraged to go on any longer trying to persuade his mother and himself that they were having a delightful evening.

He left a too-large tip under his plate, and as they went home beneath a sky that quivered with heat lightning his mother told him what she thought about it.

"They simply laugh at you behind your back!"

CHAPTER XXI

LOST in self-pity, Clifford walked right into Ethel Brown's Art Table Committee, that was meeting with his mother, chairman of the Sale and Supper to be held for the new church furnace fund. The ladies, purple or pale from heat, stopped their languid discussion of the dainty little zinnias that could be made by painting pine cones, and greeted a man enthusiastically. Mrs. Cater called: "Here's a *real* artist, girls! Now we'll get some good advice!" Elsie Weismuller gave her skirt a tug down over her fat knees. Ethel Brown said: "Mercy! I'm scared to death to have *Clif*ford hear my poor little plans! No fair! Shoo! Go 'way!" Martha Simpson gave him a meaning smile, and patted the sofa beside her, causing several ladies to exchange glances.

I'm in for it, he thought, sitting on a chair arm in an attitude that looked carelessly easy, though it was a strain to hold it. He really couldn't sit beside Martha, in front of them all. He felt fleetingly glad that he had just cleaned his sneakers.

"Well, ladies, if there's no more business to be discussed—what, Ethel? Oh, those pin-trays ——"

"I got two dozen of these little ash-trays at the Five and Ten, to decorate. I always think it's so hard to find

things gentlemen want to buy. I've painted these three little samples—forgetmenot, daisy, wild rose——"

"Ah-h-h!"

"Aren't they sweet?"

"Why, *Eth*el! You're quite an artist!"

"Oh, no, I just daub!"

"Well, of course Ethel took art from that lady in Hamilton," Martha said.

"Why, *I* didn't know you took, Ethel!"

"Oh, I just took a few times, for the fun of it. I just did these in a hurry, they're nothing but sug*ges*tions. Now who's going to do the rest for us?"

"Don't look at *me,* Ethel Brown! I can't draw a straight line!"

"Now, girls, don't be silly! If *I* could do it, *any*one could! All you have to do is to sort of get on to the petal touches, and I just can't do *ev*erything myself."

"Of course there *is* an artist present," said Martha.

Attention ceased to center upon Ethel.

Mrs. Weismuller asked: "Who?" and several voices answered: "Clifford, I guess——" "She means Clifford, don't she?" "Clifford Hunter."

"Oh, I'd never *dare* ask Clifford!"

"Do you think you'd know how, son?" Mrs. Hunter asked doubtfully.

"Why, Mrs. Hunter, what a question!"

"Well——" said Clifford.

"Oh, oh, oh! *Would* you? I'm going to be brave, and coax!" Ethel warned, putting her head on one side and clasping her hands in humourous supplication.

Pretending a modest doubt of his ability, he couldn't help thinking that he would astonish them by the beauty and originality of his work. But he let Ethel give him her samples, while Mrs. Hunter murmured: "Well, I suppose Ethel can show you if you get stuck ——"

He passed iced-tea and cake, pretending to be a butler. The ladies, burying their noses in the mint bushes that topped the glasses, said they were in stitches from the way he carried on, never cracking a smile. He actually offered them cigarettes, and made them laugh so that they could hardly say: "I don't indulge!" or: "Not any, thank you!" Ethel, carried away by excitement, took one, flourished it about, pretended to puff. Men certainly go to poor Ethel's head, Martha thought, smiling kindly.

"Est-ce que vous voulez du thé, Mademoiselle?" Clifford asked Elsie Weismuller, daringly trying the French he had been studying in secret. Elsie just blushed and giggled and hung her head, but Martha called out brightly:

"Oui, je le désire, merci beaucoup, Monsieur!"

To the accompaniment of applause they exchanged graceful bows, together in a little companionship of culture and French conversation.

"This is a very fine new waiter you have, Mrs. Hunter!"

"Yes, indeed, my new French butler!"

He knew his mother was proud of him. And the ladies all said he was a scream. Elsie giggled so, she choked on her iced-tea, and got hiccups.

The next day was Sunday, and he stayed in his room painting ash-trays until late afternoon, when, with open indifference and secret satisfaction, he called his mother to see the result, expecting cries of admiration, for they really did look very Russian or Czecho-Slovakian to him. The cries came, but they were of unfeigned horror, drowning his casual "Think these'll do?"

"But *Cliff*ord! They aren't like Ethel's!"

"Unfortunately *I* haven't had the advantage of taking art from a lady in Hamilton!"

"I know you haven't, that's why I sort of wondered when you offered—and those are the kind the ladies like."

"My God!"

"Please do not swear at your mother, Clifford."

"Sorry."

"*Two—doz*—en pin-trays! I wonder if they could be painted over? Tchk! Tchk! Tchk!"

"I suppose this is spreading the Kingdom! Painting trashy little ash-trays with forgetmenots!"

"Clifford!"

He burst out of the house, letting the screen door slam

behind him. He was furious at his mother, at Ethel Brown, at the ladies. He was furious at himself.

He kicked through the meadow, and threw himself down where the stream slid beneath the willows. Biting tender grass stems, he rolled over and stared up at the sky.

It had been grey all day. Now, as he gazed, veil after veil was drawn away, showing clear blue swept by white pinions, strong and shining.

"Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain—who maketh the clouds his chariot ——"

He didn't want to remember the Bible. He didn't want to admit that there was anything connected with religion but fussy ladies—to admit that the midges danced in air, against coloured sky. But the words rose in his memory.

Up from behind the pine-covered hill poured clouds of dusky, rosy gold, smoke and fire streaming over glistening feathers.

"—— he toucheth the hills, and they smoke ——"

That happening in the sky, and he and his mother hurt and angry over "petal touches."

He got up. He followed the stream. He didn't know where he was going, or why. He only knew that he must go into the woods.

CHAPTER XXII

BITTER at being dropped by Cathleen, Clifford went to the Simpsons' for the first time in months, comforting himself with their welcome. Martha appreciated him, if Cathleen didn't. He had forgotten what a splendid girl she was, broad-minded and intelligent. He liked being scolded by her. "Clifford! *You,* with your wonderful gifts, to talk about life being futile!"

Mr. Simpson was delighted to have his listener back, and told him about an interesting sloth he had seen long ago, its fur coloured green by a growth of minute algæ. Once, when Clifford pulled from his pocket an empty snail shell he had found in the woods, Mr. Simpson began to tell about snails the size of dinner rolls that laid eggs as big as pigeons' eggs, among begonias and ferns. From his talk rose the Brazilian forest. Overhead the swirl of tree-ferns and palms turned mystically, like the wheels of Ezekiel's vision; great velvet leaves netted with ivory or rose moved, though no wind blew; tendrils reached into the motionless air; a lizard's green disguised it on a branch festooned with air-plants and tufts of fern. Hidden water dripped, and the fragrant air was humid.

Clifford imagined himself going to the jungle to forget everything; tramping in becoming khaki, through

leaves that flickered with little lizards. Years later he would emerge, lean, bronzed, famous, and Cathleen would thrill at having known him.

While Martha gave a music lesson, Mr. Simpson showed Clifford the nature books he had bought from a gentleman who had come to the door when she was away. You paid so much down and so much a month. Martha had been put out about them, but Clifford's interest made Mr. Simpson pleased with his purchase again.

Clifford turned over the coloured plates, and paused at one that showed a red-brown pitcher curving up from a droop of slender tendril.

"Nepenthes, meaning—uh—freedom from sorrow, forgetfulness," said Mr. Hunter. "The East Indian pitcher-plant. It has a sort of honey around the edge, that attracts the unfortunate insect, which then—uh—falls into the watery acid below, and is used by the plant for nourishment."

In the next room "Monastery Bells" ended in minor chords. Then the front door slammed.

Nepenthe, Clifford thought. Freedom from sorrow, forgetfulness. They were the most beautiful words he had ever heard.

"The carnivorous plant is—uh—a study well worth a body's time," said Mr. Simpson. "I have heard of a kind growing in the swamps of Nicaragua that is—uh—large enough to eat small animals—indeed, the natives

say it is a man-eater. Doesn't the poet write about Nature, red in tooth and claw? I myself have not had the opportunity of—uh—uh—observing a man-eating plant, but I once kept a plant of the—uh—droseraceæ family —a sundew, in popular parlance—on my—uh—window-sill, and fed it for a considerable period on bits of beef-steak and hard boiled egg ——"

There was a nearing tinkle, and Martha came in with pitcher and glasses and cookies.

"I just thought I'd serve a little lunch—any customers? What are you two conspirators hobnobbing about? Oh, those books of Papa's. Well, can you come down to earth and partake of a little cider?"

"Well, Martha, I declare, that's very thoughtful," Mr. Simpson said hastily, still uneasy about the books, and Clifford thought, how he loves her! She is a real home-maker, a fine unselfish girl, always thinking of others.

This is enough, he told himself over and over again. The beautiful strange world, my friends, my painting.

Then a sight of Cathleen, a smile from her, a memory of something she had said on the evening by the lily-pool, would crumble his defences, he would forget that he was through with her, he could only want to do something for her, loving her so that he forgot to wish for happiness.

The days and moony nights were beautiful. The velvety red dahlias seemed heavy with colour, the yellow

pears were heavy with sweetness and juice. The warm still air was saturated with the nearness of fulfillment.

Aunt Edith fussed about Etta, linen, food. Cathleen saw what life in Pine Hill was going to be, with no Bill any more. For, even with Elise, he would not come back; his publishing firm was sending him to London. He and Elise would be married almost at once, and sail.

More and more she was consoled by Louis. When their hands touched, when their eyes met, she felt a pang of pain and pleasure. She saw to it that they were by themselves most of the time; she led their talk to intimate personalities. On the last day of the Clarks' visit he and she were in the damp fragrant warmth of the grape-house. Between broad leaves and heavy bunches of blue and pale green grapes, they saw the streaming rain.

"I don't want to go tomorrow, Cathleen."

"I don't want you to go."

"Shall I come back?"

"Yes. Come back."

She climbed on a rickety chair, and, reaching for a bunch of grapes, lost her balance. He caught her, and began to kiss her. His kisses were like some powerful kind drug that stopped thought, that spread through her body and freed her from pain.

"Cathleen darling, darling! Let's beat Bill and Elise to it, shall we? There's not a thing to wait for."

Once she thought she heard a voice uncertainly calling

her name. ' She lifted her head, but Louis tightened his hold, began kissing her again.

When they went up to the house, Aunt Edith said Clifford had been there. She had told him they were somewhere around, in the potting shed, or the grape-house. Had he found them? He had brought a basket of mushrooms for Cathleen.

"He said he found them over beyond Silver Spring Camp Meeting Ground—that's *miles*. He was soaking wet. I don't wonder his mother worries about him, with his weak chest—crazy boy!"

Cathleen lifted a handful of cool firm mushrooms. On some the silky veil still hid the shell-pink gills; on some, bits of wet grass were plastered. Dark earth clung to the stems. She saw the rainy meadow.

She was touched, but she made Clifford ridiculous, to amuse Louis. "You remember. He was the young gentleman, very Book of Etiquette, who was happy to meet you that day under the willows. We call him the Methodist Faun."

But she didn't want to talk. She wanted Aunt Edith, breaking off stems and looking for worms, to go away, so that she and Louis could kiss each other.

CHAPTER XXIII

CLIFFORD had always brought gifts to Cathleen from meadows and woods. There had been nuts and vermilion persimmons when they were children, and the nest lined with milkweed silk that Aunt Edith had made her keep out of doors, for fear of lice. In the past months he had given her maidenhair, wild yellow flags, roots and all, from a distant stream, wild grapes, and mushrooms. But for a wedding present he sent a trashy little glass and silver marmalade jar, that embarrassed her; she didn't want to look at it, or touch it.

She asked him to come and photograph her in her wedding-gown, wishing him to remember her veiled and white. She was mildly disappointed when it was Mr. Hunter, with his stomach like a melon, his thick spectacles, his walrus moustache, who knelt at her feet and arranged the shining folds.

Mrs. Hunter went to the wedding, and described it at supper.

"That dark little old church! It smelled real mouldy, too. They had candles burning, regular Roman Catholic. And Bishop Ely, of course. Dear me! I don't suppose it would be legal if anyone connected with *Miss King* got

married without the *Bish*op! Oh, guess who was right behind me! Evie Davis, if you please, as bold as brass! Who asked her, I should like to know? Did you let her have the afternoon off, Elbert? You're too easy with that young lady. Well, anyway, you folks didn't miss much, though I think it was very foolish of you not to go, Clifford, when you were asked to the reception and all. I shouldn't wonder if Cathleen didn't think it was funny you didn't come—still, I don't suppose she noticed. But there wasn't anything to see, no flower girl or bridesmaids or anything, and I called up Mrs. Johnson, and she said there was some shell in her lobster, she said we really didn't miss a thing. She said some of the ushers were certainly intoxicated, that it was very embarrassing. I suppose that's New York stylishness! She says there's been a good deal of talk over the wedding being so sudden, but she says *she* thinks that Cathleen simply showed her sense in not taking any chances; she says you don't find young good-looking millionaires hanging on every bush, and of course that's true. I asked her if she saw your present, son, but she said she didn't notice, there were so many. I certainly think you ought to have gone, sending a present and everything. You'd've had a real good time. Oh, Clifford, Mrs. Johnson says they're showing 'The Big Parade' in Hamilton this evening. I'd kind of like to see it, wouldn't you?"

Would it be all right to go? Of course it wouldn't console his aching heart, but surely the courageous thing was to show a smiling face to the world. Anyway, what difference did it make? He didn't care what he did, or whether he lived or died.

He sat in the dark, seeing marching feet, seeing dim broken visions of Cathleen. In front of him a girl put her head on a man's shoulder, blotting out a battle. I can't stand it, Clifford thought.

After he had brought his mother home, and put the car in the garage, he struck out across the meadows, too restless to go to bed. The air still held the warmth of a day that had been like midsummer, but a misty coolness rose from the pond where spatterdock pads were black against the moonlit water. Large moths fluttered above the pale gleam of white flowers, the grass was wet with dew, and full of strange scents.

This is her wedding night, he told himself. I am hopelessly in love with a married woman.

Intangibly a feeling of relief spread through him. He need do nothing now but love and suffer, he need no longer feel that perhaps, if he only knew what to do, things might be different.

The woods were full of her. Here was the place where they had found the ferns. Here she had pressed against the mossy rock. Here her hands had been warm

in his as he pulled her across the brook. He said aloud: "That man thinks he has her, but she's here."

Then he knew she was not, and he crouched down, pressing against a tree.

In the moonlight that sifted through the branches he could see the roots that stretched out on either side of him, and pushed down through ferns and moss. Further on, something gleamed in the faint light, and, going to it, he found a cone-shaped toadstool, as big as a child's hat. He touched the edge, split deeply all around. It almost melted under his fingers. How had such fragility pushed its way up through the earth?

He went through cool darkness, now and then touching the pine trees from whose bark oozed thick sticky drops, to the spring that pulsed among the maidenhair. Lying flat, with his outspread hands crushing the ferns, he sucked up the water thirstily, and rose with his face coldly dripping. Then he went on through woods that night had made mysterious and vast, pausing to listen to sudden delicate cries and rustlings, hearing louder and louder the sound of the waterfall, until he reached his cave, crept inside, and fell asleep heavily, at once, wrapped in the lap-robe he had brought, with his coat rolled up for a pillow.

During the night he was awakened by thunder that boomed and rolled through the continuous thunder of the

waterfall. Lightning showed rain blowing like smoke across the mouth of the cave, pine branches and curled ferns straightened and streaming. Then the storm lessened, the night was full of water flowing, water falling. He put out his hand as if he expected to find someone beside him in the dark, and fell asleep again.

As he went home in the early light every needle on the pines was surrounded by water, and light through the branches turned them to crystal trees. The silvery mulleins rose cool from the warm strewn brown of last year's leaves, drops of rain were held up, round and separate, by their down, so that light shone around and through them. He wanted to touch them, to touch everything, to push through to something hidden; he ran his hands over velvet leaves, over hurting bark. He smelled the rain-soaked earth.

He let himself into the sleeping house. He was starved. He had eaten nothing yesterday. First he had decided not to, because surely anyone whose only love was marrying another man wouldn't want to eat, and then when he had tried, because he felt dizzy, and because of his mother's protests, he had found, surprising him, pleasing him a little, that he couldn't.

On the kitchen dresser was a platterful of doughnuts. He looked at them doubtfully. Would anyone who was terribly unhappy—and he was, he was!—be able to take an interest in food? Would it make unhappiness not

count? He pressed his head against the wall, feeling the dark tide rising. He didn't want to do anything that would take away from the reality of the sorrow that was his only comfort, his only dignity. But he was hungry. He ate a doughnut, and then another, and another, thinking defiantly, no one will ever know.

PART TWO

CHAPTER XXIV

EVERYTHING is over, Clifford thought, finding a melancholy satisfaction in the symbolism of the season on the morning when quilled flowers were brown-black, the leaves of the weeping-willows were curled, and grey as if they had been powdered with chalk. On the higher slopes where the sun melted the frost that lay white in the hollows, cobweb-covered grass was wet; dead leaves, lightly striking the leaves on the branches they fell through, made a sound like splashing water.

He wandered in a restless stupor through woods where everything was frozen, except a few bright ferns that lay flat on the banks of the stream. The excitement of unhappiness was gone, leaving only a colourless discontent.

Martha brought a sepia print of the Bridge of Sighs to the studio, to have it framed, and told him that Papa had been asking for him. "You just don't know how much your visits mean to him." So Clifford went to see the Simpsons, and sometimes, talking to Martha, he interested himself again. She would put the Cape Cod firelighter under three small neat logs, for Clifford, in descriptions of evenings with the Kings that grew in the telling, had spoken of intimate confidences before their

open fire. He would talk to Martha about the penalties of the artistic temperament; she would confide in him, telling selected troubles, asking advice. "I don't know why I'm talking this way to you. I generally *never* talk about myself, I'm funny that way, I'm *too* reserved, I guess. I kind of shut up, generally, with most folks—it got to be a regular joke at Rockville, they used to call me the little Sensitive Plant. But you're so understanding, it sort of *helps.*"

Sometimes he read her the poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay, or she read him the poems of A. A. Milne, and told him how crazy she was about kiddies, with anecdotes to prove how the kiddies worshipped her. Sometimes they popped corn. She let him tread popcorn into the rug without a word.

The part of Clifford that was not dreaming of Cathleen, the part of him that had come from the woods to this small neat room, was contented.

But in the dark he thought of Cathleen, he longed to be near her.

After all, she had been enthusiastic about his painting. If he went to New York he would be near her, and he could make a living by his art. Looking at the covers of Vanity Fair and The New Yorker, he felt that introductions must be the important thing, and he was sure she or her husband would give him those.

He bought a linen smock in Hamilton, and tried it on, behind his locked door. It made everything seem possible. He chose the paintings he would take to show art editors. Not Spring Zephyr, or The Spirit of the Waterfall, but this summer's work, praised by Cathleen. There was a Bacchante, that Evie had posed for, with grapes. He propped it on a chair, and pretended to be painting on it, in his new smock, stealing glances at himself in the mirror.

He would be willing to start humbly. Just covers and illustrations, at first, or even advertisements.

He knew his mother was interested in his work, and that she bragged about it, but he always dreaded showing her a picture, she so often said: "Oh, see, here's a face—look, this bump on the tree is the nose, and this little gap in the leaves makes a perfect eye!" or: "Yes, but doesn't it look just like a dead cow when you get it in this position? Look, son, if you turn it upside down and sort of screw up your eyes!" Now, when he told her that he wanted to go to New York and make painting his life work, he was not surprised that she thought it the most foolish idea she had ever heard of. Not really hearing her protests, he went out to where his father was cutting dead flower stalks close to the ground, and told him, in a voice made casual by nervousness, what he wanted to do.

"And, oh, Papa, by the way—I was wondering——"

He had to stop to catch his breath.

"Would you be willing to lend me some money, on a perfectly businesslike basis?"

He had braced himself for explanation and argument; not for understanding.

Wanting to laugh and cry, exalted and frightened because his plan was going to come true, he dashed into the studio shouting: "Evie! Guess what! I'm going to New York to live!"

She looked at him blankly for a moment before she began to cry. Then long moaning sobs were torn out of her, tears ran down her distorted face.

She went on and on, gasping. She couldn't stop. He was terrified. He pushed her into the developing room, and made her sit down. "Evie! Stop! Stop! Please stop!"

She didn't answer, she didn't even cover her face, red-eyed, red-nosed, white-cheeked, mouth open, stiffly grotesque.

He shook her gently. "Don't, Evie, please don't! I'll miss you like anything. I'll be coming back famous, Evie—doesn't that make you laugh? Evie, don't!"

She was exhausted at last. He washed her face with his handkerchief wet in cold water. A smear of red came off on it.

He stood looking at her nervously, not knowing what to do next. Then he pretended to hear a customer outside. At the door he turned to give her an encouraging smile, but her eyes were closed. She looked as if she were asleep.

CHAPTER XXV

CLIFFORD called at Cathleen's house when he got to New York, but the Clarks were out of town for a week or so.

Well, he thought, feeling sick, I'll get a job before she comes back. I'd really rather do it without asking her husband to use his influence.

From his cheap room downtown on Sixth Avenue, he went to see art editors. He would go up in elevators, his portfolio held so tightly that his arm quivered. Then he would be coming down, the sick thudding of his heart growing quiet. But it would all have to be done over again.

"Am taking time to look around, as it seems to me important to get into the right sort of work at the start," he wrote to his father and mother. "Meanwhile am making a great many interesting contacts with people of importance in the art world. It is great fun exploring New York, eating in queer little Bohemian restaurants, etc. My nice room is in the heart of Greenwich Village, the stamping-ground of all the painters and writers. Am feeling fine."

In the streets indifferent faces pouring past confused him, he was afraid of turning dizzy and falling under

wheels. The Elevated banged and clattered overhead, metal music clanged from peepshow places. He wanted to make his money last until he got work. He tried to live on oranges and crackers and prepared coffee, but sometimes he went to one of the restaurants with stale elaborate wedding cakes in the windows, for coffee and lamb fry, or chocolate éclairs. He would be gnawed by hunger, and yet after a mouthful or two he couldn't eat any more. He felt a little sick all the time. He couldn't get warm. The wind went up his belled trousers. He couldn't sleep because of the noise, and his dread of the next morning.

His father, pleased and interested, had given him a letter to a New York photographer he had known as a young man. Clifford had not meant to use it. That was not the sort of work he wanted. But it had been increasingly comforting to remember, and one day he tried to find him. There was a small stationery shop at the address, with greeting cards and bisque statuettes in the window, Madonnas in forget-me-not blue, St. Anthonys in brown. The people had never heard of Mr. Field. They had been there for eleven years, and the man before them had been named Strauss.

Every day he looked for an answer to the note he had written Cathleen. He would make himself climb the stairs slowly, to prove that he knew no letter waited, to prolong his hope. I know it hasn't come, he would say,

opening each letter in turn, because that might make the last one be from her. A forwarded advertisement of a trip around the world. A forwarded list of Victor records. A letter from his mother. A Good Luck postcard, embossed with a pink horseshoe and a green four-leaf clover, from Evie. A forwarded appeal from the Hamilton Hospital.

Well, I knew there wasn't one. I knew it all the time.

Then a note came. Cathleen would be home on Tuesday, and asked him to tea.

Life became worth while again. He went to the Metropolitan Museum, and other art exhibits, so that he would be able to talk interestingly. At one he stood behind two young men who were looking at a painting. They bent their fingers and twisted their wrists, following in the air the lines of the calla lilies. The one in the lavender shirt said: "Pretty swell!" and the one in horn-rimmed spectacles answered: "Mm. A certain monumental quality." Sissies! Smart alecks! Clifford thought, despising them, wishing his clothes were like theirs. He had expected artists to be unkempt, he had been pleased with his rough tweeds; but now he realized that his ideas had been old-fashioned.

He bought Bohemian cups and saucers, splashed with blue and orange, and, stacking them on his mantelpiece, saw the room lovely with candle-light and flowers; the dirty salmon walls became luminous, vaporous, as sunset

clouds. He was giving a little studio tea, and showing his paintings.

Will you pour, Cathleen?

I'd be delighted, Clifford! This is quite an honour!

The honour is mine ——

But perhaps it had been silly to get a whole dozen cups and saucers, he reflected, counting his money. And he had to spend some more, on a new hat, before he could go to see Cathleen.

His hat charmed him in the shop, and, trying it on in his room, he was sometimes pleased, and sometimes worried for fear it was so pale a grey as to look dirty-white. Anyway, he thought, reading inside the box-lid, "Positively Not Returnable," it doesn't look like a Pine Hill hat. He tried on the three soft shirts, pale green, pale blue, lavender, that he had bought in New York, and chose the blue.

He couldn't talk at first. He had so much to say, he had said so much to her in his heart, he couldn't begin in the way he knew was correct, asking how she was, how Mr. Clark was, and what she heard from Bill. He managed: "This is a great pleasure, I'm sure!" and jumped up when she offered cigarettes, and said: "Allow me!" when she put out her hand for matches. But he was thinking, Cathleen, it's you! It's really you!

Because he seemed part of home and Bill, because she had been rather homesick, most of all because of the im-

pression her surroundings must be making on him, she was glad to see him. He really is a nice little man, she thought.

She said things she thought he would like to hear, that might make him fonder of her. She found herself presenting a picture of a lonely girl, adored, but misunderstood, forever longing for the spacious fragrant shabbiness of the dear old home. She really felt homesick as she talked. Subtly suggesting how she had missed the understanding, understood talks with him, she found herself hinting at all sorts of things that made her more interesting, more touching. Pulling herself up, she began to talk about the cheerful side of her life. She didn't mean to be brave, but that, she realized from worshipping comments, was the effect she was giving, and she did rather enjoy it. And then her dwelling on the bright side changed to delicate boasting about her brilliant, interesting life. If she had heard from anyone else the things she was telling, she would have been intensely envious.

At first she felt real pity for him, he looked so ill. She drew him out. He intimated that he was being nearly fought over by rival art editors. She wondered! But she was too relieved to pursue the subject, for she had feared he might want help, introductions. He boasted so that she soon decided her pity had been wasted.

He hadn't meant to talk that way; but since he had, he

couldn't ask for help in getting work. It didn't matter. Things would be different now.

He was flooded with a sense of home that he had never felt in his own home, shut with her in the peace of this fragrant, fire-painted room. The relief of talking with someone who understood was intensified by the indifferent, crushing city outside.

The butler brought in tea. I wish the Pine Hill people could see us, Clifford thought.

"Do be impressed by my butler, Clifford! I am, when I remember little black Wendell with his woolly head and his white jacket. I can't get used to a butler who is taller than the top of the table."

She isn't spoiled a bit!

"Lemon and one lump, isn't it?"

He couldn't keep his mouth from stretching into a wide delighted smile.

"Well, I'm sure it's a great compliment to have you remember! Yes, I guess I'm a real Russian when it comes to the way I take my tea."

"Do you remember tea under the pear tree? Just last spring, and think of the things that have happened. You living here, doing the work you love—Bill and I both married ——"

He burst out suddenly, surprising himself.

"I don't know how far I can go. I know I've been

talking as if I felt sure about things, but sometimes I'm scared ——"

The relief of admitting it out loud made him feel as if he had broken through a shell of ice that was numbing him.

"Everyone's frightened, sometimes."

"Not you? You don't ever feel sort of lost—uncertain?"

"I always do when I make myself look at the truth. I stand real life as long as I can, and then comfort myself by pretending things are true because I want them to be. Don't we all do that? We make up stories from such little things—from nothing ——"

"You, too? I thought it was only me—I. Sometimes I despise myself. If you—if other people really knew me, perhaps they'd despise me, too."

"Oh, Clifford, how can we blame anyone, when we think of the endless chain of cause and effect that leads up to each person, each act of every person? When I'm in despair about myself I get what comfort I can from that."

"When I see you looking so—the way you do, and hear you saying such beautiful things ——"

But he couldn't finish. In imagination he knelt at her feet and lifted the hem of her shining gown to his lips, he told her how he loved her, and only asked to love her and serve her forever.

"More tea?" she asked, suddenly self-conscious. "No, not you, Micky darling." Micky now and then gave the effect of leaping for cake without ever leaving the floor, his melting adoring eyes fixed on her. Clifford and Micky have exactly the same expression, she decided, giving cake to them both.

And suddenly she thought, how can I be even mildly enjoying myself? For more and more she was forgetting to be unhappy about Bill. How dull to be no happier or unhappier than anyone else, to have no secret that made her feel apart and different. No wonder women loved and cherished secret sorrows, and told about them.

I have no real depth, that's what's the matter with me!

But she hoped that it was because she was sensitive, as Clifford assured her when she told him how light she felt, she went up and down so easily.

Am I more like other people than I thought? she asked herself, annoyed.

No, she decided. Since she could ask herself such a question, it proved she was different from others in her honesty and disillusionment, and far, far ahead of most in her humility.

"No more, thank you, but it was most refreshing," said Clifford. "May I offer you one of my cigarettes? I think I remember they are the kind you favour. By the way, have you happened to see the exhibition at the Anderson Galleries? Some pretty swell work—one study of

calla lilies I think you'd enjoy, really rather monumental."

"I must go," she said, and realized, even while she assured herself she was getting over missing Bill, that nothing would ever be right again without him. With Bill, Clifford would have seemed funny and nice, but without Bill he was pathetic and common and rather boring. She wished he would leave. She saw him through Louis' eyes, as time went on, flashing for Clifford, beginning to drag for her. And because she was sorry for him, and didn't want him to know she was so tired of him, wanted, somehow, to make up for that, she talked gently, kindly, so that he ached with love.

CHAPTER XXVI

CLIFFORD had said: it is going to happen. I am going to see Cathleen! And in a flash he was on the other side; the hour, lived for, longed for, was in the past. Yet it hadn't seemed to be passing quickly. He had been able to think, this is happening, now; I am with you; I am still with you; even while she bade him goodbye.

But this was only the beginning. She had said: "You must come soon again."

Although she had not said a disloyal word, he was sadly, happily sure that she knew her marriage was a mistake. Perhaps he could help her, somehow.

He liked the people on the streets, and was sorry for the ones who looked tired, or old. He gave a beggar half a dollar, picked up a baby who had sat down unexpectedly, and ran upstairs, whistling, to his friendly room.

He spent the evening writing letters.

"Dearest Papa and Mama,

"I wonder if you have been having this spell of cold weather at home? It keeps looking as if we were going to have a regular blizzard here, but I guess it is too cold

to snow. Well, this is the life! I only wish you were here to do all the interesting things I am doing. I miss you both more than I can tell you, but am sure I will never regret having come to New York. As J. H. Mannheimer, the art editor of The Playboy, and one of the really important men in the art world here, said to me this morning, Hunter, there are more artists in N. Y. than you can shake a stick at! And really, as J. H. says, this seems to be the art center of the world. And I have also indulged to some extent in social pleasures. Had afternoon tea this P. M. with Cathleen King Clark, who inquired for you both, and wished to be very kindly remembered ——"

You must come soon again.

He went over each perfect moment, repeated her words, and his own, saw her smiling at something he had said as she filled his cup. She had been radiant at first, but then she had seemed to grow sad. Had it been because seeing him made her think of "the days that are no more"?

He finished his letter. Tender towards all the world, he thought: I'll have mother over for a little visit as soon as I get settled. He imagined her child-like eagerness, her dependence on him.

"I am looking out over the lights of the city, that are twinkling like stars," he wrote to Martha Simpson, for although it was late, he was too excited to sleep. "Won-

der what is going on behind all those lighted windows? Many a human drama I suppose.

"I often think how you would revel in the opportunities New York affords, the Metropolitan Museum, where I spend many an hour just wandering, and the exhibitions. Then there are many quaint places down here in 'The Village', only known to those who are 'in', where one meets the great and the near-great, such as The Squirrel's Nest, where one hears much good talk. Also, I thought of you and your appreciation of all things musical, this afternoon while at afternoon tea at the home of Cathleen King Clark, when she was describing a very fine performance of La Boheme she attended in a friend's opera-box last night. Have not yet had time to indulge in this pleasure, but am looking forward to doing so in the near future."

Suppose Cathleen asked him to go to the opera with her, or to come to a dinner party? He would have to have a Tuxedo, at least, and he hadn't the money. He would rent a dress suit—he would pawn his watch—he would have found work ——

He had one postcard, a view of lower Broadway, left from the collection he had bought on his second day in the city. He would send it to Evie, he thought, remembering how she had cried. He was sorry for her, although nothing else had happened to show that she

minded his going; her goodbye had been so casual that his relief had been tinged with annoyance. Still, he thought she would be pleased to hear from him. He wrote on the postcard: "Thanks for your horseshoe—it certainly has brought me luck!"

CHAPTER XXVII

CLIFFORD wanted to be with Cathleen again, at once. Perhaps she would come out to tea with him. Not at the Ritz or Sherry's, or any of the places where he imagined her spending her afternoons; even with Cathleen he wouldn't be brave enough for that. But at one of the little tea-rooms in the Village. The Dolly Varden, where they specialized in waffles, and all the waitresses wore mob caps, or The Squirrel's Nest, where, he had found on one adventurous evening, plucking up his courage and getting past the lady in sandals, with big gold and turquoise tassels in her ears, there were pictures drawn right on the walls, and people who looked as if they must be celebrities, seen dimly through the smoke of an open fire and cigarettes.

Cathleen declined his invitations sweetly, and for convincing reasons. After all, from the way he had talked, he had gotten to know quite a lot of people in New York, she thought. It wasn't as if he really needed her. Besides, she felt he could easily become a nuisance. She remembered Bill's warning last summer, and decided it would be kinder to drop Clifford now, before it would hurt him. For you couldn't explain the ridiculous creature, in that get-up of pale blue shirt, and trousers wide

as divided skirts, by saying he was nice in the woods. So she told him she was heart-broken, she hadn't a second for days ahead, but she would call him up the very first free one. He had made an arrangement, as yet unnecessary, by which he could be reached through his landlady's telephone.

I'll ask him to tea again some day, she thought, and then forgot him in her new friendship with Roland Barr, who was painting her portrait.

Clifford decided not to go to Pine Hill for Christmas. The idea possessed him that if he left New York he would not come back. He wrote vague enthusiastic letters to his mother and father about all the engagements he was tied up with, telling them he knew they would understand, and that through all the celebrating and gaiety with his new friends he would be thinking of them.

But Pine Hill and its people had grown shadowy to him. Nothing made him homesick except the smell of the piled up Christmas trees. He hurried past them on the street, but afterwards, through noisy feverish nights, he was obsessed by a longing for the woods, fresh and silent. There would be no sound except the faint hissing of snow that plastered the trunk of the old pine tree beside his cave, and clung to its plumey boughs, filling them, piling them, downy and deep. Then the snow would slip soundlessly into the drifts beneath, the branches would spring up, free. But soon the snow would cling to them again.

He ordered a bunch of red roses sent to Cathleen for Christmas. Their price startled him, and when he had paid he had only enough left to buy handkerchiefs for his mother, and a muffler for his father. He tried to improve these by writing on the cards that went with them: "From *Fifth Avenue!*"

The florist's box was on the hall table when Cathleen came back from her first Christmas without Bill, spent with Louis' father and mother at their country place. She was tired from the unspontaneous enthusiasm of the last few days, and when she saw Clifford's card, and the dead roses, tears filled her eyes.

"Look, Louis! From my poor little Methodist Faun —oh, you wouldn't remember. But I know he hasn't much money, and please look where they came from! I mustn't ever let him know they were dead when I got them. Oh, dear! I wish people wouldn't be so pathetic!"

Louis kissed her, rather absently. "Well, it's a sad life, full of tragedies like getting roses from admirers. Here's an invitation from Charlie that sounds pretty good—want to go?"

"Go where? Oh, yes, let's! That's the night of the Orrs' dinner, but we could go on afterwards." She put the roses on the floor, to be thrown away, and, as she leaned towards the hall mirror to wipe her eyes and pow-

der her nose, the heavy pearls that had been her Christmas present from Louis swung out.

Feeling better, she lit a cigarette, and sat down to write to Clifford. How should she explain the delay in thanking him, without telling him she had been away when his roses came?

"Dear Clifford:—

"Thank you more than I can say for the heavenly roses—my favourite kind, and I can't tell you how I love them, and how they have cheered me through what others optimistically call a touch of influenza, but what has seemed to me a knock-down blow! That is why I haven't been able to tell you before the gratitude I was feeling."

She hesitated, twisting her pearls around the fingers of her left hand, then wrote swiftly:

"I'm looking forward to seeing you just as soon as I am a little more myself—meantime, best wishes for the Happiest of New Years, from

"Cathleen Clark."

Because I *haven't* time to let him come and see me during the holidays, she thought, sealing her note. Probably he's in Pine Hill for Christmas, anyway.

But Clifford had spent Christmas day alone. He had a box of presents from home, and some Christmas cards. At six he made himself go and have a three-course tur-

key dinner, at Childs', for a dollar and a half. This is quite festive, he told himself, looking at the wreaths of artificial holly in the windows.

As the days passed he grew to feel that he was the one unaccompanied person in the city. Sometimes he sat among hotel palms, pretending he had an engagement to meet someone. He would look at his wrist-watch, frown with impatience, and finally, unable to wait a minute longer, rush out, to wander aimlessly alone.

Other people seemed sure of themselves. Only he was confused and apprehensive.

He was in a fog, pierced through by wounding intensities. The crowds, the noise, terrified him; he lost what had sustained him, the inward assurance of his own importance.

He began to have a little fever most of the time. The fog grew thicker, the stabs of vividness more brilliant, more jagged. A paint-smeared face, a quivering arrow of scarlet light, a taxi-horn, would hit him as if his brain were exposed, he would have to dig his nails into his palms to keep from screaming.

He would lie awake at night, coughing, feverish, half awake, realizing the people in the city. Suffering, dreaming, loving, dying, working—huddled in a doorway, dancing, praying, lying in each other's arms, turning on the gas to die. They filled the night around him, they would not let him rest.

After a night of fever he would sit in his room, numbed by inertia, waiting for something; a message from one of the offices where he had left his address, a message from Cathleen. His money was almost gone, and he did not want to write home for more. I will try another place, he would tell himself; and in imagination he would get up, put on his hat and coat, go down the stairs and out. But his body sat still, apathetic with the deadly conviction of having made a mess of everything.

He was lost. He could never find his way out of this room that slowly filled with darkness. Feeling had left his hands. He looked at them and could not lift them. He could not get up and open the closed door. He heard steps on the stairs, and made them Cathleen's, he made her open his door and come to him and hold him close until he felt again, until he could feel her breast under his heavy head, until her warm nearness saved him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

I WILL make one more effort, Clifford thought. I'll go to Cathleen, and tell her the truth, and ask her if her husband will give me a letter to someone.

Her fire was lit, her tea-table spread, her room was sweet with dark red roses. He heard her light feet swift on the stairs, and Micky's accompanying patter.

"Oh!" she said, pausing in the doorway, for she expected Roland Barr. How stupid she had been to say to Thompson only that she was expecting a gentleman. But Roland had come so often lately that she had noticed with annoyance that Thompson was beginning to look—well, understanding. She had suddenly felt shy of saying: "Mr. Barr." This was what she got for being afraid of her butler!

Roland came almost at once. Who's this? he asked wordlessly, as Cathleen put out her left hand to him, and wordlessly she answered: Did you ever see anything so hopeless and absurd?

Clifford's feet nervously trod on each other as he sat listening to their intimate unexplained references, their mutual laughter. He couldn't understand what they were talking about. Then, in different voices, they included him.

"Mr. Hunter is a painter, too, Roland."

"Ah?"

Cathleen put sugar and cream into Roland's cup without a question, and turned to Clifford.

"And yours?"

"Why, same as ever—that is, any way at all—lemon, if it's convenient—oh, you haven't—oh, yes! Thank you, lemon. I'm told that's the Russian fashion ——"

She was being polite to him. Why did he want to die?

She was annoyed at his pushing in, for she had told him always to telephone. She didn't want anyone else when Roland was there, especially one who wouldn't reflect to her credit in Roland's eyes, and she certainly didn't want anyone else when Clifford was there, for different reasons. But seeing Clifford smiling uncertainly and pretending to drink from an empty cup, she felt compunction.

"These roses make me think of your father's garden. Mr. Hunter's father is the most wonderful gardener, Roland. He keeps beating my aunt at it, and filling her with fury."

Clifford eagerly seized the opportunity to prove to the other man that he was an intimate friend of Cathleen's, too.

"Remember the day we went to the woods for ferns for your aunt, Cathleen? I'll never forget that wonderful day! And remember when we dug up lilies for her, and

I had to pull you out of the swamp, and you lost your shoe?"

Really, he's getting a little beyond himself, she thought, pretending not to see his offered cigarettes—"*Our* kind, Cathleen!"—and snubbing him, sweetly, sweetly.

"I don't remember ——"

"Oh, *yes,* the wild red lilies—you remember! And you were soaking, and we simply roared all the way home, we laughed so hard?"

But she failed him, answering from a distance, sweetly, coldly.

He tried to help her, to hide her from himself. She had always seemed exquisitely fragile, in need of protection, but now she was hard, hurting and meaning to hurt. He went on, insisting, emphasizing, because he must penetrate to his own Cathleen, he must make her reassure him that the woman he had dreamed of was real. He must get back his own identity; Cathleen's friend, interesting, understanding Clifford.

He really is impossible, she thought. Shouting and getting red and acting as if he owned me! She answered, her voice still lovely, gentle and sweet:

"You have a better memory than I have, Clifford," and turned to Roland. "I want you to advise me about my costume for the tableaux. Laurence says orange-red velvet, but I thought violet."

Clifford gave up the struggle. He only wanted to get

away before he did something shameful, before he cried, or was sick.

Hurrying along with his head down, blind with tears, he wanted to hurt her, to hurt himself until he could forget the raw pain that consumed him. All right, he said to himself, I'll show her whether I care.

But why did she ever act as if she liked me?

Well, she needn't worry, she won't be annoyed again. Even if she begged me, I wouldn't go to see her.

She needn't worry. I care absolutely nothing for her. I'll show her. I guess they're probably laughing at me now. Much I care!

When Clifford went, Cathleen sank down among soft cushions, remorseful but relieved.

"Oh, dear! I was nasty to him. I want a cigarette. Was I, Roland?"

"Pretty nasty."

"But I didn't say anything actually horrid. *Did* I?"

"On the contrary, you were very polite. Who is he?"

"He comes from the place in the country where we used to live. He's a funny little man—well, you could see for yourself! Very intense. He paints things—oh! A lady in white for The Spirit of the Dogwood, and a lady in pink for The Spirit of the Crabapple. He dances in leopard skins at strawberry festivals, and thinks things are very pleasing. My brother calls him the Methodist

Faun. He's ridiculous, but he's pathetic, too. I hate myself for having been mean—but he pushes in so."

"I was rather sorry for him myself, but it's no use trying to do anything for people like that. They simply drain you, and you don't really help them. Don't begin trying. It's useless."

But I will do something to make up, she thought, feeling closer to Roland because she had admittedly been mean, and was sorry. She would find out if Clifford really was all right. If he wasn't, she would get him work with some photographer. Louis or Roland would manage it for her.

She telephoned him, not quite as soon as she had meant to. But he had gone back to Pine Hill.

CHAPTER XXIX

ALL the way from New York Clifford dreaded reaching Pine Hill. Sick and defeated, he felt that everyone would laugh at him for slinking home. He imagined the cruel comments. But when he got out at the Hamilton Station, when the Pine Hill car clattered across the bridge over the stream, and he saw Mrs. Weismuller and Elsie sitting opposite, and beyond them pine trees black against a smouldering sunset melting into a pale green sky, his heart leapt because the world was no longer unfamiliar. Elation mixed with his misery.

In the glow of his mother's cries and kisses, while his father beamed through his spectacles, and cleanliness, safety, comfort surrounded him, Clifford was happy. He stroked the fresh smooth pillow case on his bed, he enjoyed the new cake of soap and the clean towels in the bathroom. Coming downstairs to the sound of the "dinner music" over the radio, that his father was listening to, his chair drawn close before it, Clifford sniffed the freshly watered geraniums. Bright electric light fell on their crimson velvet petals and the silver-green turn of their scalloped leaves, banded with cinnamon brown. He wandered to the warm kitchen, where boiling saucepans shook on the stove.

But the first buoyancy was followed by dissatisfaction. He wanted more fuss to be made over him, he wanted his father and mother to go on expressing their delight at his return; he wanted to feel the excitement of homecoming, himself, even more intensely. Everything went flat, and despair seized him again.

He had thought, heavy with bitter importance, that he would have to explain so much. But his mother, although she was happy to have him back, sorry he had been disappointed, couldn't wait, after saying that now he must tell her everything, to hear about his affairs. She had to tell him about the committee for getting new plumbing for the parsonage, of which she was chairman, and the unchristian behaviour of Mr. Boles, who was being more of a plumber than a Brother; of Mrs. Noyes trying to beat Papa down on the price of photographs of Holy Trinity, which Mr. Noyes had sent out for Christmas cards, and what she had advised Papa to say to Mrs. Noyes; of the peculiar remarks of Mrs. Weismuller, reported by Mrs. Johnson, concerning the cocoanut cake Mrs. Hunter had given the ladies when they met to discuss the Sunday school Christmas tree. And she began making an outcry about his cigarette ashes exactly as if he had never been away; and asked, about his new hat, "Oh! Did you *like* it?"

Nobody cares, he thought. Nobody really cares whether I live or die. Certainly *I* don't.

Mr. Hunter couldn't let Clifford out of his sight, although as usual they hadn't much to say to each other.

"Well, it's fine to have you back!"

"It's fine to *be* back."

"I don't suppose you got a chance to look up O. S. Fields, did you?"

"Well, I tried to, Papa, but he wasn't there any more, and the people didn't know where he'd moved to."

"That's funny! I wonder where he's gone? Didn't leave any address?"

"No, they didn't know anything about him."

"Well, I certainly thought you'd find O. S. at that address, I thought he'd be some help to you, maybe. I wonder where he is? I hadn't heard about his moving."

Mr. Hunter had bought chocolate éclairs in Hamilton for supper that night. "Why, Papa, what got into you?" Mrs. Hunter had exclaimed. "Clifford don't care particularly for éclairs, does he? And I had a nice orange jelly." But he looked so discouraged that she added hastily: "Well, I guess it'll make it more like a party to have éclairs, and we can have the jelly tomorrow."

Clifford hardly ate anything. But when his father was called to the telephone, his mother hissed: "Son! Papa went all the way to Hamilton to get those specially for a surprise!" So he ate two, thinking they would choke him, saying how good they were, ever so much better than any he'd had in New York.

To have his father beaming with shy pleasure made him want to cry, filled him with a strange faint remorse. He felt he would have been strong enough to bear anything except the sight of his father's happiness.

After his mother and father had gone to bed he went down to the kitchen in his stocking feet, with all his paintings. He bent, ripped, tore. He crammed as much as he could into the stove.

He destroyed every souvenir of Cathleen; his few notes, a handkerchief, dried sprays of maidenhair fern, a Christmas card. She and Martha had both sent him Christmas cards with angels on them. Cathleen's had been humorous. A highly glazed angel in a night-gown trimmed with glued-on glitter, playing a harp while she sat with a bulging behind on a cloud. Martha's angel was one of Fra Angelico's, on rough art paper, and tiny printing told him that it had really come from Italy. He had admired the exquisite taste of Martha's, but it was Cathleen's he had carried with him everywhere.

He put his keepsakes on the red coals. The stalks of fern turned to twisting gold wire, the angel bent double, as if it were in pain.

CHAPTER XXX

EVIE'S radiant happiness next day could not warm Clifford's cold misery. He was tense, when he tried to smile he could only stretch his mouth stiffly; now and then his teeth clattered.

"Listen, Clifford, you feel bad, don't you? Too many parties in New York?"

"Well, I guess I overdid a little; it's hard to say no to your friends. I do feel sort of grippey."

"There's an awful lot of it around. You ought to take something."

"What I'd like would be a good stiff drink."

"It wouldn't hurt you. Got anything?"

"Well, no. Of course in New York ——"

"La Vergne has some good whiskey. Want me to get you a bottle?"

"Oh, I guess I'll be all right."

"He's in Hamilton today, but I know where he's got it hid."

Well, why not? Anybody might buy a bottle of whiskey. It would warm him up. Anybody might buy a bottle of whiskey for medicinal purposes; although no need of mentioning it to his mother.

Evie brought the bottle when she came back after lunch, and he hid it in his room.

Martha telephoned in the afternoon. "Well, Stranger! Welcome home! I'm not going to tell you how much all your friends have missed you, 'cause I don't want to turn your head. Papa and I are just crazy to hear all about New York and everything. Come on over when you can."

"I'll be glad to."

"Come over this evening, why don't you, if you're not doing anything?"

Well, why not? Martha would be glad to see me. She's loyal. She doesn't take up a person, and drop him.

But after supper he felt so miserable that he thought he wouldn't go.

I'll take a drink now, instead of waiting for bedtime, he decided. Maybe it will brace me up. He got the tooth-brush glass from the bathroom and poured out some whis-key. He wasn't sure how much he ought to take. It nearly choked him; then nothing happened. He evi-dently hadn't taken enough. He drank some more.

He was warm by the time he reached the Simpsons', warm and relaxed for the first time in so long. It was easy to talk to Martha, looking prettier than he had ever seen her, in a rose-coloured dress, with her cheeks bright from the fire. He was very funny about his New York experiences, he had to laugh himself.

When Martha said "We'd hate to lose your society, Papa, but don't sit up a bit later than you want to—Papa's had a bad cold, and he isn't feeling very lively," Mr. Simpson said: "What?" in a bewildered voice, and then: "Oh, yes!" and got up at once.

Martha, coming back from helping him upstairs, turned out all but the lamp with the old rose shade, saying too much light hurt her eyes. She had put Driftwood Blaze from the Gifte Shoppe on the fire. The green flames fluttered and leaped, and Pussy washed herself before them, curling a white paw, lifting a hind leg straight as a stick, vibrating with purring and the energy she put into the strokes of her little pink tongue.

"I just can't help telling you how wonderful it was of you to realize how much it would mean to your mother to have you home again. I know what a sacrifice you've made for her sake. You've been *big,* Clifford!"

He came across the room through green firelight to where she sat on the sofa, feeling himself move with a slow floating lightness, like the deep sea diver he had seen in moving pictures.

"Martha, you're very understanding. You understand things. You're very understanding."

He looked at her tenderly. What's the matter with him? she wondered. First he was in such wild spirits, laughing so hard he couldn't finish his stories, and now,

although he was smiling, there were tears in his eyes. She drew away a little.

He moved closer. "You're the only girl I care *that* about," he said dreamily, trying to snap his thumb and finger. "I mean that I care *that* about. Don't get up!" He pulled her down beside him, and held her. "Don't run away from me, Martha. Stay with me, Martha."

Her heart thumped so that she thought she was going to faint.

"Clifford, let me go!"

Having her try to pull away made him hold her closer. "I'm not going to let you go! You're the only girl I care *that* about!"

She was shaken by his kisses. She had hoped for them so long, but not this way. I mustn't let him, she thought desperately. He couldn't act like this if he respected me! How can he laugh?

But his face, pressed to hers, was wet with tears. She crumpled against him weakly.

CHAPTER XXXI

CLIFFORD came from dim pulsing heat into the fresh still coldness of falling snow. He stumbled home sleepily, and lay down on his bed without undressing.

When he woke, stiff and cold, his head was clear again, though pain stabbed through it.

His breath stopped as he remembered what he had done. Told Martha he loved her. Told her he would never let her go.

It couldn't have happened!

But it had. And she had said she loved him.

He went into the bathroom and was violently sick. Then he drank a lot of water, and washed his face and hands, trying to wake from this nightmare.

It couldn't have happened.

She loves you and trusts you.

But I don't want to marry her!

How are you going to get out of it?

He walked up and down, wanting to feel the cold bitter against his bare feet, beating his hands together.

What can I do without being despicable? Martha is a sweet girl. Fine, intelligent, hard-working, unselfish. Think this thing out quietly, sensibly. She loves you, you

have lots of things in common, she loves you and trusts you, she thinks you're wonderful. Can you shatter her belief? Be a man! Because you're unhappy, why should you make another unhappy? Besides, what is your life? Are you contented at home? Do you believe you are ever going to be a real artist? Do you love Cathleen?

No—*no* ——

Well, then ——

Maybe I'm exaggerating what happened. A man can kiss a girl without marrying her. Maybe I'll be able to laugh at this in the morning.

Oh, no, I won't.

I can't live this way. I can't stand days and nights and days and nights of feeling like this. I can't, that's all.

He walked up and down, up and down, beating his hands, twisting them, shaken by short convulsions like soundless coughs.

I'm alone. I'm all alone. Oh, somebody, something, help me ——

He stopped by the open window, let the bitter cold chill him through his thin pajama jacket.

The church clock struck three. The vibration spread through the still air, filling it with a long solemn humming.

When Clifford left her, Martha leaned against the door, weak and shaking.

Had Clifford ——?

"No!" she said suddenly aloud. She would not face her fears. As she tidied the room she told herself that she was the happiest girl in the world. She tried to convince herself as she screened the dying fire; put three roses, that heat had opened wide, into the cool pantry; put on the double boiler of oatmeal; tore a leaf from Mr. Boles' calendar; let out Pussy; listened to hear if Papa was all right. But in the dark she could no longer keep her real feelings at bay.

He had been drinking. She had let a drunken man make love to her, and had told him she loved him. She had been cheap. She despised herself.

Hot with shame, she tried to forget their ridiculous, undignified scuffle, by telling herself that he had always liked her, always. He had always been respectful before, and surely he couldn't have kissed her that way unless he loved her. And she had told him she loved him.

She sat up in bed and pushed back the hair from her forehead with cold shaking hands.

It was all right. They loved each other, they were going to marry each other, and be happy. She knew she could help him and make him happy. It was going to be all right.

But suppose when he was himself again he would want to take back the things he had said. Could she hold him to them unless he still felt the same?

He had admired her and liked her, but there had never

been a sign of love-making from him before. And she was six years older than he.

"I don't *care!*" she cried, bursting into tears.

When the church clock struck three she got up, washed her swollen face, bathed her temples with toilet vinegar, put on her wrapper, and went down to the kitchen to fill her hot water bag. She drank a glass of hot water, taking a long time, for the kettle had been boiling. Between sips she prayed. "Our Father which art in Heaven, *please* make Clifford really love me and want to marry me, please, please, and I will always try to do whatever thou wishest me to do if thou only will make it all right about Clifford. Or, anyway, help me to say Thy will be done ——"

She got back into bed. Sensations, hopes, doubts, indecisions turned in the slow whirlpool of her tired brain, until, quieted by prayers and the hot water bag, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXII

MARTHA telephoned to Clifford in the morning, asking him to come to her at once. When he came she offered him his freedom. It was the bravest and most unselfish thing she had ever done. When she began she felt good, pure, ethereal. She was almost dizzy with selflessness. It was easy. She felt ready for any sacrifice, any suffering; she felt that her goodness must shine through her, so that he could see it, and would love her for it. She was floating, light; her voice sounded beautiful to herself.

She told him she knew he had been excited and feverish, not quite himself.

His heart leapt at the chance of escape, at the same time that his vanity was wounded. He must have made more of a fool of himself than he remembered.

"Do you mean to imply that I was drunk?" he asked stiffly.

She looked at him unhappily.

"I apologize if I annoyed you."

"Oh, no, *no!* I don't mean that! I mean—perhaps on second thoughts—well, I mean, for instance, perhaps you didn't consider that I'm a couple of years older than you. I want to be absolutely honest ——"

And suddenly she realized that he might say he didn't want to marry her, he might accept her offer, and her throat went dry, her voice cracked and stopped in the middle of a sentence, her jaw wobbled so that she had to push up against it with a shaking hand. Above her fingers her red eyes questioned, pleaded.

He was nearer loving her than he had ever been. He answered her courage with compassion.

"I don't want to change my mind if you don't."

"Oh, Clifford, do you mean you really—want me?"

"Yes, Martha, I do. I wouldn't advise anyone to take me—I'm not making much money, I wouldn't be able to give you things or take you places. I'll absolutely understand if you decide you'd be happier with someone else, and I really guess you probably would be——"

She shook her head violently.

"Well, if you're sure you want to try, I—I'll do my best."

She began to cry again, from relief, and to laugh. He patted her awkwardly, and she caught his arm and pressed her face against it.

"Oh, Clifford, I thought—I thought——"

"Martha, stop, it's all right! Everything's all right. Wait, I'll get you a drink of water."

She relaxed into the luxury of his care. She drank the water like a child, taking a long time, because he was

holding the glass. She wanted to go on crying because it was wonderful to have him sorry for her.

"I didn't go to sleep all night long. I just worried and worried for fear you didn't mean it. And I thought you would never respect me again, because I told you I—you know! But now it's all right, isn't it?"

"Yes, everything's all right."

When he was dressing next morning, his mother called: "Clif*ford! Tel*ephone!" adding: "It's Martha Simpson," and stopping the carpet sweeper so that she could listen better from the living room.

Martha's jubilant voice pierced his ear.

"Good morning, Mr. Man! Listen, dear, what do you think about telling people about—you know? Not everybody, but there're just a few folks that would be hurt if it got out and I hadn't told them. I didn't know how you felt about it, whether you wanted it to be a secret?"

"Ask Martha if she's going to Caters' this afternoon," called Mrs. Hunter.

"What, mother? No, nothing, mother was—no, go ahead and tell as far as I'm concerned," he said, wanting people to know, so that he couldn't go on thinking, maybe I can still get out of it.

But squeaking over the snow to the afternoon mail, he felt: perhaps it hasn't happened, for everything else was unchanged from the day he came home. The A. and P. store was still devoting its window to a special of Baby

Belle canned peas, there was the same "Vera loves Roy" in blue chalk that he had noticed on the post office wall. The same flattened cascade of begonias pressed against Mrs. Mittendorf's window.

But Miss King, coming out of the post office, stopped him to say: "Well, Clifford, I hear you're to be congratulated."

At his startled face, she added:

"It isn't a secret, is it? I certainly understood Mrs. Johnson to say Martha Simpson told her."

"Well—uh—no—I guess it isn't exactly a secret."

I'd better hurry up and tell mother and father, he thought.

"I guess it isn't, if Mrs. Johnson knows! I must tell Cathleen when I write. She'll be so interested."

"Yes, please tell your niece. I consider myself a very lucky man. Miss Simpson is—well, she's a very wonderful girl. I'm certainly very lucky."

Mrs. Mittendorf was watering her begonias as he went home. "Con-grat-u-la-tions!" she mouthed at him through the glass.

"Miss Mah-tha Simpson wishes Mis-tah Cliff-ahd Hunt-ah to call her up," Evie announced mincingly, as he came back into the studio. "Your girl friend's nearly worn out the phone calling you."

CHAPTER XXXIII

MARTHA was light-headed with the relief and excitement of being engaged to be married.

Although Mrs. Johnson had made it unnecessary, she gave an announcement tea, which was described in the Pine Hill Notes of The Hamilton Star. "Valentine's Day favors and colouring were featured, the tea-table, where Miss Ethel Brown presided over the coffee-urn, being dainty with red candles and red carnations." And the "original and very unique method" of the announcement was highly commended. Little Hazel Cater, a well-covered Cupid, gave each guest a cardboard heart on which was written:

"Martha Leota Simpson is planning very soon
With Clifford Elbert Hunter to go on a honeymoon."

Clifford was in anguish at the thought that Miss King might send the account to Cathleen.

Every symbol of her approaching marriage was beautiful to Martha. *"Darling!"* she whispered, touching the delicate lace of her new boudoir cap, running a finger through loops of glossy pink ribbon; she lifted her new pink negligée from the spare room bed, and rubbed her

cheek softly against its marabou edging. This was making up for everything; all the conscientious years of taking care of Papa, when she thought she'd go crazy, all the tight nerves, the head-aches, the secret tears.

In the midst of people, in the little flurry of congratulations and teasings, she was happy. When Clifford was with her in public she clung to him; she wouldn't do anything without asking him. She told "the girls" that for all he acted so quiet, he was terribly jealous.

It was only when he and she were alone together that she had to force herself not to admit that she was disappointed.

Fortunately, she was too busy to see much of him. There was sewing and shopping, and her friends were being lovely about giving showers for her. Before they were engaged, she had loved being alone with Clifford. They had always had so many worth-while subjects to discuss, and they had never felt embarrassed. But now he was changed, he didn't seem interested in anything. She tried, with an increasing feeling of strain, to say things he would like, to be with him in admiration of a sunset, a tree. She did not trust to her own feelings, but tried to please him by expressing what she thought would be his. She watched his solemn face anxiously, unable to relax and be comfortable with him. Sometimes she felt terribly sorry for herself.

It wasn't that she wanted him to act the way he had

on the evening when they became engaged. The memory of that still made her blush hotly. She didn't want him to behave in any way that wasn't nice. But he might have told her he loved her, once in a while, without her having to ask first.

She tried to make herself believe that he cared for her too deeply to be able to put it into words.

He didn't want to be alone with her, either. He tried to be kind, but he didn't know what she expected, and he couldn't manage to feel spontaneous.

He didn't mind holding her hand, but he didn't mind not holding it.

Sometimes she touched him so that he felt really affectionate, and sorry for her because he didn't love her enough. But then she would get playful, and begin to talk baby-talk, making him rigid with embarrassment.

Sometimes, when she was trying to get him to show an interest in their wedding, or their home together, she would forget her lurking disappointment, and be happy and enthusiastic. She thought she would have little Harold Cater as the ring-bearer. But should the ring be on a satin pillow, or lie in the heart of a lily? That was the question that was keeping her awake at night.

She consulted him about flat silver. Did he like the Nell Gwynne pattern, or the Martha Washington?

Oh, God! he thought. I wish I was dead.

In her imagination they had long intimate talks about

the new wall-paper for their room, or how dearly he loved her. She was perfectly happy except when he was with her.

She told herself that after they were married it would be all right. She looked forward to marriage, dimly, as the miracle that would change everything. But she was in no hurry. There were other things about marriage, necessary, she supposed, but certainly not nice, that she dreaded, and turned her thoughts away from.

Meanwhile, they held Mr. Simpson between them, like a screen. He had never been so popular. It was a surprise to him, for he had grown used to being sent to bed early when Clifford came; but he made the most of it.

CHAPTER XXXIV

I CAN'T go through with it, Clifford thought. I can't, that's all.

It wouldn't be fair to Martha, either. The only courageous thing to do is to tell her the truth. I'll tell her I admire her and respect her more than anyone else in the world, but I don't want to marry anyone, ever.

What was it people said, when one still loved, and the other didn't? By mutual consent ——

No use trying to get her to give him up, since he had let his chance go by. He told her that he was no good, hinting at a dark past, begging her to consider before she threw herself away. She said she loved him more than ever for being so honest, and that nothing should ever part them. Indeed, she was more clinging, after the hints that he realized made him seem mysterious and romantic, although he had never meant them to in the beginning.

He walked for hours. As long as he was walking away from Pine Hill, he felt better. Maybe something would happen. But when he turned back, he knew that nothing would.

I must think things out.

But he couldn't get beyond wild schemes. He would go away and never come back. He would get his father

to stop his wages, so that he could not support a wife. He would do something so publicly outrageous that even Martha could not forgive him.

No, it was no use. He would have to marry her, and devote his life to a brave deception. Martha must never know. The world must never know. Cathleen would hear of his happy marriage, his adoring wife.

They call me happy! God!

Slightly consoled, he thought: I guess I'm a fatalist, I guess I always have been. Anyway, I'll play the game!

But consolation changed quickly to panic. I must do something! I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul!

But the days passed.

The world withdrew, leaving him lost, alone. As he plodded on and on, anywhere, as long as it was away from home, the crust of black earth gave way under his feet, the brittle grass crunched. I must think things out, he told himself, deep in the woods, stirred by the sound of water running beneath thin ice.

He saw blunt green points beginning to push up through the pine-strewn ground. Sticky crumpled leaves unfolded on the beeches. Pond and stream foamed with masses of jelly-like frogs'-eggs. But he saw them through the darkness of his trouble, he was shut away from them. In the places that had been his he was a stranger.

Yet the rising bud transfixed the dead leaves of the skunk-cabbage, reminding, promising, waking memory and desire. This used to be, and this will be again.

"My, but you look sober, dear," Martha told him. "You aren't mad at poor little me, are you?"

"Of course not."

"Has dis 'ittle dirl been bad? She just dets *awful* fwightened when Clifford looks so solemncholy!"

"I'm all right. You're too imaginative."

"Is it because I don't come on more walks with you? Honestly, honey, I just wish I *could,* but goodness, I'm just about rushed to death! The bunch is giving me another shower this afternoon—isn't it precious of them? And tomorrow afternoon Ethel is having a bridge at the Tea Room for me—goodness knows when I'll get time to finish my sewing, it's a mercy my Hope Chest was so full. Oh, listen, dear, you know Mother and Father Hunter said they'd give us the Davo-bed I wanted; *could*n't you go over to Hamilton this afternoon and look at the one at Merton and Zell's? I told the man I couldn't decide till you'd seen it, I couldn't make *any* promises. I told him I'd send you over, and he said he'd be on the lookout. He was kind of a small elderly man with sidewhiskers."

But Clifford went to the woods.

He went again the next morning. When he was too tired to walk any more, he sat with his head in his clutch-

ing hands, still for so long that the tiny yellow-brown frogs did not hide from him. With twilight their throats swelled into transparent bubbles. The sweet piercing chorus of their peeping filled the darkness through which he went, drifting, light, detached, to tell Martha he could not marry her.

"My, but I'm glad to see you, dear!" she greeted him. "This is the first nice thing that's happened today. Papa don't feel good—I'm kind of worried about him. And my head's been splitting. I got just awful blue. But I feel all safe and happy again, now that you've come."

I'll tell her tomorrow, he thought.

But the next day Mr. Simpson was worse. On the third day Martha, swollen and glazed from crying, clung to Clifford, and sobbed: "Oh, honey, if it wasn't for you I'd be all alone!" while he kissed her wet cheek gently.

CHAPTER XXXV

MRS. HUNTER felt that Clifford was not quite happy.

Why won't he confide in me? she murmured. For she had often said to the ladies that Clifford told her everything. Sometimes, when he hung around, messing up her workbasket, or getting in her way in the kitchen, she thought he was going to. She would say, carefully casual: "Well, son! What's on your mind?" And, as he looked at her with strained, unhappy eyes, she would think, hopeful and frightened: now he's going to tell me what's troubling him. But he always said: "Oh, nothing."

"Well, perhaps he'll be all right once he's safely married," she told her husband. "He's old enough to know his own mind, and I haven't a thing to say against Martha except that she's so much older and I don't think she's just the wife for him, too set in her ways, but then my opinion hasn't been requested. If he's satisfied, it's all right. It'll be a good thing for him to settle down, he hasn't been the least bit of good to himself or anyone else since he came back from New York. If he'd been working for anyone but you, he certainly would have lost his job. I never did approve of his going there, I told you so at the time, Elbert."

She buried her worry under all the things that had to be done before the wedding.

She thought it would be nice for Clifford just to run over and ask Miss King for some flowers, since he had been such a friend of Cathleen's. There were their own flowers, of course, but she didn't want to pick those, she wanted to keep the garden looking pretty.

"Now, Miss King would be de*light*ed, son! Well, all right, all right, if you don't care enough to take that little trouble for your own wedding I have nothing to say, only please don't expect *me* to go, I don't know how I'm going to get through all I have to do as it is. Of course I'm very glad to have the reception here, since Martha seems to want it, but I hadn't an i*dea* she thought of having so many guests and everything. Mrs. Johnson says she's heard several people remark on its being a little peculiar considering Mr. Simpson's having died such a short time ago, and I must say I think so myself, although of course I didn't tell Mrs. Johnson so. But I've got all the lemons to squeeze this afternoon, and the plates to get down and wash, and when it comes to wanting me to go to Kings' for flowers, well, you'll just have to go yourself or go without."

"Of course it's terribly precious of Mother Hunter to insist on having the little reception at their home," Martha confided to Ethel Brown. "And of course I can't say a word, on account of Clifford, but it does make it

hard for me to have her wanting so many guests and everything, because since Papa's so recently passed on I think it would be better taste to have everything very very quiet. I wouldn't say this to anyone except you, Ethel, but isn't it *fun*ny how some folkses are just the sweetest and dearest folkses that ever were, and want to do just everything for you, *on*ly it's got to be *their* way? And Clifford isn't much help. Mother Hunter said she was going to send him to Kings' for some more flowers for the decorations, but I doubt if he gets there, he's so dreamy. Still, I guess most men are, when they're in love."

They were married in Mount Pleasant Church. It was a small wedding. "Just family and very very intimate friends," Martha had explained to all the people who might feel hurt at not being invited. But since, at Papa's age, "you must expect it," she decided it wouldn't be lacking in respect to have Earl Mittendorf sing a tenor solo: "I Love You Truly."

Martha had taken off her black, and was married in pale grey, with her mother's cameo brooch. Her eyeglasses glittered, her cheeks were scarlet. The white roses of her bouquet trembled.

Then she and Clifford were standing in the bay window of the Hunters' parlour, under a bell of white carnations, among rented tubs of ferns.

The guests were solemn, even while they drank the

health of the bridal pair in glass cups of lemonade. Cousins of Martha's, from Rockville, Pennsylvania, sat together, silent except when someone was introduced, when they would half rise from their chairs, sit on air, and say: "Pleased to meet you."

Mrs. Hunter said: "Yes, indeed, we had it made to order," when people told her what a beautiful day it was; stood on one foot, stood on the other, and longed for the time when she could kick off her new beaded slippers. Tomorrow she would call up Brunkmeisters' and tell them what she thought of the icecream. She'd be pretty sharp, too. She'd say: Mr. Brunkmeister, I don't know what *you* think, but *I* think it takes more than a little colouring matter and a few seeds to make strawberry cream. And she was worried, too, because Mrs. Johnson said someone had broken a tooth on a lucky charm in the wedding-cake. Where had Papa gone? He ought to be here, in the receiving line. One good thing, that Evie Davis had had the sense to stay away, although Clifford had been foolish enough to invite her.

She glanced at Clifford, and away again, quickly, wanting to cry. It's just because I'm so tired, she told herself.

"Well! *Mrs. Hun*ter!" Ethel Brown cried to Martha. "Doesn't that sound funny, after being used to Miss Simpson for so long? Honestly, my dear, it's just the most perfect wedding ever! It almost makes me want

to go and do likewise! Wasn't Earl's solo di*vine?* It absolutely made me *weep,* but then I always do cry at a wedding, I'm funny that way." Her eyes behind their horn-rimmed spectacles sought Earl Mittendorf.

"Earl was certainly in very pleasing voice," Martha agreed, thinking: Ethel's making a perfect show of herself. You could tell where poor Earl was, any time, by Ethel's pink hat. But she said aloud:

"Now it's your turn, Ethel. They say one wedding always makes another, so you won't be able to avoid it."

"Oh, say not so!" Ethel beamed. "Mrs. Hunter, isn't it lovely to see two people as perfectly happy as these two? Martha's expression was the sweetest thing, and Clifford put so much feeling into his responses, several people remarked on it. Oh, I think Earl's looking for me—Hoo-hoo! Look at him look! He don't see me—comical! I think I'll go coax, and see if he won't give us another selection."

She went off singing:

"I love you truly, truly, dear,
Life with its something, *life* with its tear ——"

"Goose!" said Mrs. Hunter. "Why *will* girls run after men and force them into paying attention? Goodness! Unless a man does the running after, what possible satisfaction can a girl get out of it?"

"I *know!* I feel just ex*act*ly that way about it! Wouldn't you think a girl would have too much dignity?" Martha agreed, and then nervously changed the subject, although of course it had nothing to do with her. "I hope someone's taking care of Cousin Almira. Just think of coming all the way from Rockville when you're ninety-two! Dear, if you get a chance you might say some little thing to let her know how much we appreciate it."

I wish this was over and I could go, Clifford thought, smiling with a stiff mouth. Then he remembered that when he went, Martha would go with him.

As she cut the wedding-cake he suddenly saw himself at tea with Cathleen. He saw her lifting the tea-pot in which the fire was reflected, and gently, radiantly smiling, though her eyes were on the filling cup, at something he had said. Martha's bouquet lay on the table, and his hand pressed down on it. The thorns ran deep into his palm.

While she changed from grey to tan, he escaped to the back yard, and leaned against a tree, squeezing his eyes shut. The shattering sweetness of lilacs flooded him.

Pulling himself together, he opened his eyes, and looked from the three bright beads of blood on his palm to the massed lilacs, purple-red as if they had been dipped in wine.

He saw Cathleen, breaking the branches of lilac a year ago.

He tried to light a cigarette, but he could not bring match and cigarette together.

Going towards the kitchen door, he saw his father sitting alone on a bench, the too-big new suit he had bought for the wedding drooping around him, a white carnation drooping from his buttonhole, half out. Mr. Hunter slowly took a bite of wedding-cake, staring ahead, but he did not swallow it, the bulge stayed in his cheek.

"Because of Papa," Martha had asked Clifford to ask Earl and Winfred, ring-leaders of "the bunch," to have no jokes; no signs of "Just Married" and "May All Your Troubles Be Little Ones," and old shoes with white bows, tied on the back of the automobile that took them to the station. But she herself had provided a pretty touch; baskets of tissue paper rose petals, to be thrown instead of rice.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CLIFFORD couldn't realize that it really had happened. He was unable to think of anything to say. He longed to be alone. And Martha couldn't think of anything to say, either, and had a headache.

She had set her heart on going to New York for their wedding trip. She thought it would be nice to look up Clifford's artistic friends. But it thrilled her to have him say that he wouldn't care to have his wife know such people.

Going down to dinner in the hotel, she stole a glance at her reflection in the elevator mirror. Her tan crêpe, with the small summer fur, was nice, even in New York. She looked at Clifford sideways, half timidly. If he would only smile at her, or act as if he were enjoying himself a little, it would be all right. But he just stared ahead solemnly. He wouldn't meet her eyes. She couldn't know what he was thinking. And suddenly she felt so lonely that her nose tingled, she had to catch her lower lip in her teeth to stop its trembling.

They didn't like to look around the dining room too much. They hardly spoke to each other, and when they did it was in low tones, clearing their throats first.

"It's funny what this hotel gets its reputation on! I really can't say I'm impressed!"

"Did you notice the airs of the head waiter, as if he expected us to fall down and worship him? I must say he amused me!"

"Clifford! Hm! The waiter, dear."

"Well, what will we have? What would you like, Martha?"

"Oh, I don't care."

"Haven't you something in your mind?"

"Well, no. I'm really not at all hungry." What prices! she was thinking.

"Shall we have some oysters to start with? Two orders of oysters, with cocktail sauce, please."

"Oysters are out of season, sir."

"Uh—what?"

"Out of season, sir."

"Oh—oh, yes, of course. Well ——"

"Hors d'oeuvre, sir? Or I can recommend the grapefruit *en surprise*."

"Well—is that nice?"

"Very nice, sir," said the waiter, looking bored.

"Would that be all right for you, Martha? All right, two of that."

The grapefruit came, perched high on shaved ice in silver chalices tied with big glossy pink satin bows. Martha blushed, and thought the people at the next table

were staring. No one else in the whole dining room had anything so conspicuous.

When dinner was over, Clifford suggested the theatre. Martha thought it would be nice to see a worth-while play, that would make them think. The Theatre Guild, or Walter Hampden. But Clifford wanted something deafening, blinding, that would keep thoughts away. So they went to a musical comedy.

When Martha was going through things, after her father's death, she had found a little pair of mother-of-pearl opera glasses, in a case lined with dark blue satin, that had belonged to her mother. She had put them in her bag tonight. But she couldn't see anyone else using opera glasses, so she didn't take them out. It made her feel apologetic to her dead mother to be ashamed to use them, it made her heart, already aching with self-pity, ache with love for her mother. She tried to comfort herself by putting her fingers into her bag and feeling the cool ridges, while she remembered how her mother had loved her and thought she was perfect.

She hated the show. Horrid! she thought, when the girls kicked up layers of chiffon and lace, revealing little chiffon drawers, because tonight she wanted, deep in her heart, to be white velvet flesh shedding petals of lace and chiffon, and she wasn't, she wasn't. These girls made her feel plain and middle-aged, no matter how much she condemned their empty faces to herself. Clifford,

seeing her tight mouth, seeing her ostentatiously strain to read her program when the Baron of Rootabaga made a rough joke, and the rest of the audience shouted with laughter, thought: Oh, God, why can't she like things a little, or pretend to? Why must she always be judging? But when she tried to act as if she were enjoying the evening by swaying and nodding in time to the music, he wished she wouldn't, he thought people were looking.

At the intermission she sent him for water. And coming down the aisle it leapt from the cup, for he thought a head lifted from cloth of silver was Cathleen's. It wasn't. But his hand shook so, when he tried to refill the cup, that he could hardly manage it.

As they went in a taxi to their hotel, Martha's faint objections to the expense easily overcome, he saw that she was crying. Her hand, when he took it, was trembling. He thought, surprised and touched: she's frightened, too! He tried to comfort her, she put her aching head down on his shoulder.

"Don't cry, Martha."

"I—got to feeling—kind of ——"

"I'm going to take care of you. I'm always going to take care of you."

"Clifford—do you—*you* know?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Say it," she whispered, her face hidden against his shoulder.

"You mean say that I——? I love you, Martha," he told her, drawing his arm closer around her. And, taking care of her, protecting her from night life in New York, he felt that he did. Her helplessness made him strong and self-reliant. "Do you think the taxi-man's taking us to the right place?" she quavered; and when he replied: "No, I think he's kidnapping us for our millions," she nestled closer to him, laughing shakily. She smelled fresh and faintly sweet; her cheek, as he kissed it, was smooth. For the first time he felt older and stronger than Martha. How she loved and trusted him! He thought: I will always take care of her. I will always try to make her happy. He glowed with good resolutions.

He unpacked his suitcase while she shut herself into the bathroom. When he had packed, that morning, he had found the bottle of whiskey Evie had brought him on the day he had become engaged to Martha. It was still partly full. He had hidden it from his mother; he dared not leave it behind where she might find it. Now he unrolled it from his pajamas, and put it in a bureau drawer.

Martha was taking forever. He was getting nervous again. Just a little drink would brace me up he thought. Not a real drink, just a pick-me-up. He poured some out, added ice-water, and, with his eyes on the bathroom door, gulped it down.

Still she didn't come. He took another drink. He began to feel warm and relaxed. He got into his new striped silk pajamas, and admired himself in the mirror. Dear little Martha, he thought. She loves me so! We're going to be very happy, after all.

There was so little left in the bottle that there was no sense in saving it. Besides, he didn't feel what he had taken. He was just glowing and affectionate. He solemnly lifted the tumbler to his reflection. "Here's luck!" The two figures bowed acknowledgment of the toast.

The bride came out of the bathroom with drooping head, holding her new pink negligée closely about her, and trying to stop shaking. She was drawn into a knot of dread. Until today she had tried not to look beyond the music and white roses of her wedding; she had pushed down all the thoughts that were not nice. Now the time she had refused to face was here, and she was panic-stricken.

The pink marabou of her negligée cast a glow on her face. Why, she's lovely, Clifford thought, seeing a rosy blur. Dear little Martha, she's the one person in the world who really loves me, and she's lovely! He put out his arms. "Oh, no, no, no!" she gasped, so faintly that he did not hear her.

CHAPTER XXXVII

WHEN Clifford woke, Martha was still asleep, exhausted after her long hysterical fit of crying. It was light enough to see his watch. Quarter to six. He dressed in the bathroom. Then he wrote: "Have gone out. Will be back in time for breakfast." If she found him gone without explanation, she might make a scene, thinking he had left her, or killed himself.

She'd have good reason for thinking so, too, after the things she had said to him.

So this is what being married is like, he thought, stealthily shutting the door.

No. If it had been Cathleen ——

Downstairs the hotel corridor was cold and quiet, the light on bulbous gilded sofa legs and crystal chandeliers was dead. Cleaning women, on their knees, lifted cloths from grey water, a man was sponging the fronds of palms. They looked at Clifford as if they thought he was crazy. No doorman, yet.

The skyscrapers were floating in mist. Nothing was solid.

He walked north, not caring where, unreal in an unreal city, until he was about to pass Cathleen's house. That would be unbearable. He turned west sharply.

He felt dull and bewildered. What had Martha expected? What were they going to do? He didn't want to see her or speak to her. What could he say? She despised him, and was afraid of him. He looked at the people on the street with a crazy idea of stopping them and asking how they managed.

Excuse me, sir. Does your wife despise you? Excuse me, madam. Do you resent being married?

He reached Central Park, and sat down. The trees near him were black and hard, not like growing trees. As manufactured as the bench he sat on, and the rubbish can near him. More distant trees were misty blurs, edged by the tall floating buildings.

He lit a cigarette and filled his lungs with smoke. It made him light-headed, he held on to the bench to anchor himself.

He smoked cigarette after cigarette. He couldn't think things out; threads of thought floated, were caught by a grey squirrel looping like a wave across the path; by a soaked flattened cracker-jack box; were lost. He only knew everything was a mess.

Well, he'd have to go back, sooner or later. Now that he and Martha were in this trap together, he couldn't desert her. She was as miserable as he was, he supposed. Perhaps they could talk things out. They couldn't go on this way. He would say: let's be honest. Let's get things clear between us.

The hotel doorman, in red and blue and gold, was in his place, saluting, when Clifford got back. People were in the corridor, walking importantly behind their luggage, or going in to breakfast. It must be late—she would think he had left her. He felt sorry for her, suddenly. Perhaps she no longer felt what she had gasped out, hysterically, shrinking away from him. Things often looked different by daylight.

He hesitated in front of the flower stand, started away, and then came back to buy a bunch of carnations for her. They would help him through the desperately dreaded meeting.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MARTHA woke, and lay tensely still. No sound from the next bed. She opened her eyes, sat up, and saw, with a sick lurch of her heart, that his clothes were gone.

But his dressing-gown sprawled across his bed, a sleeve hanging; and she found his note on her pillow. Oh, what a relief! Both that he was coming back, and that he was gone.

She must be dressed before he came. She hurried, straining to hear his key. Better bolt the door.

She had cried so hard last night that she was a sight. She washed her face with cold water. Her skin was patchy, her eyes were swollen, and her nose was mauve, no matter how much she powdered it.

When she got her clothes on, she felt more like herself. Each thing—her hair-net, her Orienta pearls, her glasses —was one more connection with the life she knew, the safe world she had always lived in. She even put on her hat, and laid her fur and purse and gloves together, before she unbolted the door.

Then she sat down at the window, with her back to the beds. She wouldn't let herself think of horrid things.

But when he came back, what could she say to him?

She must have something ready. There must not be a silence.

She hated being married.

Don't think of horrid things. Remember your new dresses, the new things waiting at home. Remember all the interesting things there are to see in New York.

But she couldn't help feeling forlorn, and tears filled her eyes. She mopped them and her nose carefully, bolted the door, powdered her nose again, leaning forward in order not to get powder on her nice dress, and unbolted the door.

Perhaps she ought to tell him she was sorry for the way she had acted. He said she had made him miserable. But then he had made her miserable.

She mustn't cry any more. She thought about Earl's solo yesterday, and what a goose Ethel Brown had made of herself. And when she thought of Ethel, she knew she was glad, in spite of everything, that no one could call her an old maid.

She remembered that at Rockville, when she was younger, she had been proud because none of the young men had ever forgotten themselves with her, and she had felt superior even when the confidences of other girls made her envious. Perhaps this was all perfectly natural, and she was just paying the price of being more sensitive and spiritual than most women. But it was so unlike the dreamy sweetness she had imagined when she played

"Night in Venice" on the piano, thinking of love and marriage. She remembered Guy Price Parker, the English literature instructor at Rockville. The other girls called him Old Lady Parker, behind his back, and made fun of his looks, and his broad A's, but she had never met anyone she thought so wonderful. He was whimsical and cultured, and used to tell her what it meant to him to find someone who understood. When he said that Venice was the only place for a honeymoon, she had been tremulously, expectantly happy. But then he had married the fat daughter of the Seminary president, and gone to Washington for a honeymoon. He and his bride had shaken hands with President Harding, and seen the cherry trees in bloom; but Martha thought there was a depth of sadness in his eyes when he came back to Rockville. If she was married to Mr. Parker ——

No, she must not let herself think of another man. Clifford was her husband, and she must try to forgive him. She must try to help him by giving him an example of sweetness, spirituality, long-suffering. First Corinthians, thirteenth chapter, she thought.

She had never shirked her duty, she would not shirk it now. When Clifford came back she would tell him she was sorry, and that she hadn't meant all she had said. She looked into the future, and saw herself bending tenderly over a sleeping baby; heard herself singing

lullabies in the twilight. Clifford knelt beside her. "My madonna! I'm not worthy to touch you——"

After awhile things would get all right.

But she was so nervous, torn between feeling hurt at his staying away so long, and dreading his return, that she couldn't sit still doing nothing. She carried the telephone book to the window, and looked up Ethel Brown's aunt, and Cathleen Clark. Then, getting interested, she hunted for names that she knew from the Sunday papers. Vanderbilt, Astor, Morgan. But all the time she was listening, and when she heard the key in the door she jumped up, her breath gone. She tried to say: "Well! Have a nice walk?" as he came in, but she couldn't make a sound.

Clifford gave her the carnations. "I thought maybe you'd like these."

"Oh, *lovely*!" she exclaimed, hiding her face in them. They smelled of cigar smoke, and the calyxes were split, and had wires run through them to hold them together. She wondered what he had paid for them. Whatever he had, he'd been cheated. Anyone could cheat him, he was as innocent as a baby. He certainly needs someone to take care of him, she thought. Looking from the carnations to his anxious face, she felt suddenly, warmly tender. She wanted to cry again, in a different way. His face was grey, and a muscle jumped in his cheek. She wanted to do something for him. She said briskly,

laughing a little: "Well, Early-bird! How about some breakfast? All those in favour say aye! I guess we're both ready for our coffee, especially if you've been walking on an empty tummy. Have you got the key? I guess I don't need my gloves. Did you press the elevator button, dear? It's the red light for down, always. Well, it's a kind of a misty moisty morning, isn't it?"

She spoke graciously to the elevator man, she spoke graciously to the waiter, she said to Clifford: "Well! Here's our orange juice! I wonder if it's fresh fruit?" and laughed, she asked for sugar for her cereal, discovered it beside her, said: "If it had been a bear it would have bitten me!" and laughed. She talked and laughed nervously all through breakfast, while Clifford was silent, sinking into lethargy.

PART THREE

CHAPTER XXXIX

AFTER lunch Martha flapped a fly out of the dining-room, straightened to a fraction of an inch one of the chairs she had painted with the bird-and-basket stencil, and pulled down the shades, for the sunlight was streaming in on the centerpiece of wax sweetpeas, pink and lavender, from the Gifte Shoppe, that looked so natural, arranged with real asparagus ferns. She had bought a wax orange and a wax banana, too, and kept them with the real fruit on the sideboard. They always made fun when there was company.

Going into the living-room, she sighed sharply, for Clifford had tracked mud and grass blades over the new rug. It made her feel so discouraged that she had to collapse into a chair, feeling a pain in her back, and the little throbbing in her temple that might turn into a headache. I just *slave* to keep things nice, she thought. But it's impossible, with Clifford in the house.

Well——!

She sighed again, and went upstairs to take an aspirin. The walls of their bed-room, newly papered with garlands of roses, refreshed her, and she came down cheerful enough to turn on the radio. "——and gernish with beet-root herts," said a lilting voice. "It will be just lots

of fun—hm! Perdon—to surprise that Mr. Man of yours with this salad platter one of these werm evenings ——" Listening interestedly, Martha got out the Parlour Queen, and ran it over the carpet, which had already that morning had a thorough sweeping. But it was clean up, clean up, clean up, after Clifford, all the time.

"Now, friends, here's another hint for a dainty combination salad and cold cut platter," the radio enunciated refinedly. "Pencils all ready? Take three choice cucumbers ——"

"Yoo-hoo!"

"—— next, ladies, you split open ——"

"Yoo-hoo! Martha!"

She clicked off the radio, and hurried to unhook the screen door, waving her apron for fear a fly might come in with Ethel Brown.

"I just thought I'd run in and say hello and how you vas. Oh, Martha, what *dar*ling drapes!"

"*I* think they're pretty—see, I cut out flowers from another kind of cretonne, and appliquéd them. I'm making a lampshade to match, I think the whole effect will be kind of dainty."

"I never saw anyone like you! You have the most marveelious ideas!"

Martha looked around her living-room, seeing it through Ethel's eyes. It was beautiful to her, now that

she was rid of the dark heavy old furniture, that Papa had insisted on keeping.

"Why, mercy, Ethel, it's nothing wonderful—just comfy and homey. Sit here—oh, wait! Clifford's spilled some ashes. My dear, you'd better be thankful you haven't a husband to pick up after. Still, I suppose you've just got to put up with it, and try to remember that they're nothing but great big overgrown boys, after all."

"What an adorable couch cushion! That's new, isn't it?"

"Mm-hm. It *is* good-looking, isn't it? Even if Clifford does complain that the gold braid is scratchy. Just wait till I get my work, and then we can visit comfortably."

"I can't stay but a minute. I have to go to Mittendorfs'. I promised Earl I'd bring over some new songs I happened to have, for him to try."

Martha's sharp scissors snipped around cretonne tulip petals. Poor Ethel, still chasing Earl, she thought. "Look, Ethel, give me the benefit of your artistic eye. Would you cut out one of these bluebirds and have it sort of carelessly flying in one corner?"

"The bluebird of happiness! It certainly would be appropriate for you and Clifford, Martha! I never saw two people so blissful!"

"Well, of course we have so many mutual tastes, that makes it nice. Music, and books, and nature. And then,

of course, I'm thankful to say we both are blessed with a keen sense of humour, and that always helps so much, I think. I'm always sorry for people who don't see the funny side of things. I'm too much the other way—it's always getting me into trouble when I can't do what Papa used to call controlling the risibilities."

"I guess you had loads of fun in New York, didn't you?"

"Well, *fun*—that isn't exactly the word, Ethel. You don't have fun on a honeymoon, it's all too—well, almost sacred."

Ethel blushed, and looked ashamed of herself, but Martha leaned forward and took her hand. "You'll understand how it is yourself, one of these fine days," she said kindly. "And how it's almost too precious to talk about. Just wait till you and Mr. Right have your own little home."

"That must be so lovely. Having your own home, just the two of you!"

"Just the two of us! That's what hurts sometimes, Ethel. I try to keep smiling, for Clifford's sake, because of course I can't expect him to feel it as I do, it wouldn't be natural, but somehow I don't seem to be able to get over poor Papa. He and I had such a *hap*py little home. We just meant everything to each other, and then he was always so considerate of me," Martha told her firmly, and Ethel answered in a low, understanding voice:

"I know."

A respectful pause followed, broken by Martha saying brightly:

"I want you to give me that recipe for stuffed orange salad your mother served the ladies the other afternoon. Mother Hunter's just been raving about it."

"It must be fun—I mean wonderful—trying out new dishes for the two of you," said Ethel, thinking of Earl, and sounding so wistful that Martha refrained from asking her not to sit on her foot, although she was sure the white was coming off her shoe on to the cretonne. She tried steady looking, instead of speech, but Ethel had never been very sensitive. Martha had to get the whisk-broom, after she had gone, to brush out the chalky smudge. But she hummed as she brushed. Poor Ethel! It must be awful to be an old maid!

The tooting of a horn reminded her that Clifford was going to take her to Hamilton for new kitchen oilcloth, and she ran to put on her hat.

"Poor Marfa was finkin' Clifford had fordotten her, it was so late," she told him, pouting but playful, for Ethel's envy had made her fond of him.

"Ethel ran in for a minute, dear, she was on her way to Mittendorfs', *all* excitement. She's *still* pursuing that unfortunate Earl! I'm very very fond of poor old Ethel, but honestly, someone ought to be a good enough friend to *tell* her ——"

But the glow faded, under Clifford's lack of response. And the way he looked, to come to Hamilton! Old sweater, stained sneakers, no hat. "It's a pity you haven't enough respect for me at least to fix yourself up a little. You always looked so nice and neat when you used to come to see me. You wouldn't go round with your wonderful New York friends looking this way. I'm *not* fussing, it's simply that I want to be proud of you."

Talk, talk, talk, thought Clifford, feeling the little fret-saw of her voice cutting into his brain. He tried never to make an answer that would start something more.

"Isn't this a one way street, dear? Isn't it? Are you sure? You can't park here—can you? I don't believe so —— Mercy, Clifford, there isn't room to get in there, you'll go bang into that other car. Isn't there a vacant space in the next block? Go in *there,* why don't you? Well, they wouldn't do anything to you if there *is* a fire-plug, you aren't going to hurt their old fireplug. Heavens! That man *wanted* to be run over! But you ought to have sounded your horn ——"

Home again, he put away the car, and walked across the yard to the house. The long afternoon light shone through the clumps of bleeding-heart, turning the drooping racemes to pure transparent colour, edging the fern-like leaves with radiance. The grass became thousands of blades, each separate and vivid. He squatted, and pushed his hand along the ground. Grass blades, cool

and smooth, dragged between the crotches of his outspread fingers.

Birds were calling to each other, a robin's notes sounded, liquid and round, from the maple tree. Then came a sudden screeching and flurry from all the birds, as Pussy poured herself under the hedge, with a faint wail, and rubbed against Clifford's side.

He scratched her lightly between her ears, feeling her purring like an electric vibration. "Poor Pussy! Was she a poor little Pussy, then?" And he thought of Mr. Simpson, and how much he missed him.

Pussy put back her head, her eyes closed blissfully under their pencilled grey frown. Clifford squatted there, talking to her, gently ruffling the soft white bib under her chin, reluctant in all his being to go into the house.

Being married was neither as good nor as bad as he had expected. It was Martha now who talked, instead of his mother. That was the chief difference. That, and living in the Simpson house instead of in his father's.

Martha was a wonderful housekeeper. She gave him good meals, and he was quite pleased by her interest in his ties and socks. But she talked until he thought he would go crazy. And she acted as if he were made of mud and cigarette ashes.

But when he had put up his barriers against her faultfinding, her flow of words, he would catch her looking at him as if she were asking for something he could not

give her. He would not have been under such exhausting strain if he had not felt, sometimes, so sorry for her. He was torn between irritation and pity. Always when he was ready to be ruthless she undermined him by being forlorn.

He had expected to be changed by his marriage; to be a tragic figure, certainly, but sustained by interesting, exciting tragedy. One who had lost all the old unsureness, one who knew exactly what he was doing, who was clear about everything. And, instead, he was the same; unsure, self-conscious, fumbling; lonely except when he was in the woods.

Yet now, when Martha called affectionately, telling him to hurry in, that she had made his favourite strawberry shortcake for supper, he felt guilty, and determined to try to be nicer to her.

But he hurt her feelings again. How? He couldn't imagine, but he knew the signs; the stiff smile, the nose turning pink. He tried to make up by drying the dishes, but he put them away wrong, and used the glass-towel for the saucepan, so that she drove him out of the kitchen. However, it cheered her, she had forgiven him for what he had done when she came in and flapped open The Hamilton Star.

"Have you finished the paper, dear?"

"Yes," said Clifford, from the book he was trying to read.

"Hm! Mr. and Mrs. J. Everett Miller are going to Lake Squam!"

He went on reading. He had brought Nietzsche's "Thus Spake Zarathustra" from the Hamilton Library, and was having some trouble getting into it.

"Did you see that, dear? Mr. and Mrs. J. Everett Miller are going to Lake Squam."

"Do you know them?"

"Well, not personally, but they're great friends of Mrs. Johnson's. Hamilton people. Didn't the Caters go to Lake Squam one year? It was some place where they had white birches, I remember the postcards. It was either Squam or Squasset. Do you know the Germans are *still* making poison gas? Garnished with halved canned cherries and whipped cream—hmm—that sounds good. I'll have to try it out on you. It says here skirts are going to be longer—well, they couldn't get shorter! If you could have seen Ethel's today, and you know how stout she is, it really looked dreadful. Someone ought to tell her. Listen, dear, here's the evening conundrum —what letters make a tree? The answer is L. M.—what? Oh, *I* see! Elm! Well! Well, I suppose they have to print something. Here's that Mrs. Cranston—photo by Hunter Studio. Goodness! Did you take this, or Father Hunter? It's a wonder it didn't break the camera! Well, I guess she must be a worker. She's the new president of the Sunshine—well, for *mer*cy's sake ——!"

Through her talk, his unseeing eyes on his book, he thought of Cathleen. For since his marriage, Cathleen had become his own creation, his dream again. He made excuses for her that gave him back his self-respect, that comforted the humiliation she had given him. She wasn't well. She was afraid her husband wouldn't like my coming—would be jealous. Gradually he made it all right, and now, as he never saw her, there was nothing to disturb him. No need for nervous planning of conversation before they met; or for regretful thinking, afterward, of what he had said, and what he might have said instead. Now at last he could rest from hoping, and only love her.

He tried to think of time metaphysically. He had read a book about it, which excited him, though he couldn't understand it. Everything surely was, held in time, imperishable, unchangeable, past, present, future. The heavy wet purple lilac, the heart-shaped leaves Cathleen had broken, they were, she was as she had been.

"Dear, did you remember to get me the marshmallow whip at Weismuller's? Oh, *Cliff*ord, I was counting on it for making something first thing tomorrow morning, the girls are coming in the afternoon for a little bridge. *Sh!* Be quiet a minute! Isn't that Pussy? Let her in, dear."

She got out her cretonne tulips, and turned on the

radio, while he crouched over his book, not reading. Men's voices sang together.

"Oh dig my grave both wide and deep, wide and deep,
Put tombstones at my head and feet, head and feet——"

Perhaps Cathleen was listening to this same music.

"And on my breast carve a turtle dove,
To signify I died of love.
Fare thee well——"

"Silly!" said Martha, and gave the dial a twirl, past an orchestral roar, past a voice saying: "——and Toughy comes back with a ve-ry pret-ty wallop——", past another voice saying: "——so Sandy McPhairrrson says, Weel——"

"Oh, here's something nice!" said Martha, and sang with the radio.

"Slumber on, my little gypsy sweetheart,
Dream of the mmm and the mmm-mmm-mmm——"

"Dear, did I tell you Ethel was taking some new songs over to Earl? She pretended she just happened to have them, but I know for a fact she went in to Hamilton to get them just on purpose. It's really pathetic how

crazy she is about him, and you know as well as I do he'd never look at her. I suppose I'm funny, but I just couldn't run after anyone the way Ethel runs after poor Earl. Listen, dear! Isn't this sweet?"

"Kiss me, kiss me, a—gain!"

The radio sang, Martha sang and snipped. Once more the memory of the perfect time with Cathleen began to come through to Clifford, as it had come so often. He must keep perfectly still, and not try too hard to remember.

He could hear the faint snap and flutter of Cathleen's open fire, a clock ticking in the hall, while he waited for her, then the scrabble of Micky's nails on the bare floor, the delicate chiming of silver and porcelain as the butler brought in the tray.

He turned a page of his book, although he had not read a word.

He kept trying to get the whole thing, to get the feeling of really being there again, to rest in that, to feed on it.

He could smell wood-smoke, lilies, hot butter-soaked tea-cakes, cigarettes, the tea, in which he had been surprised to find a little white floating flower. Jasmine, she had said. The delicate perfume when Cathleen bent towards him.

Gathered into a core of concentration, he heard again the way her voice had sounded, the way he hoped his had. What had he said that had made her laugh out loud, suddenly, unexpectedly? He couldn't remember, but he could still feel the struggle he had had to keep from smirking.

He could see her really looking at him——

"Tc! Of course my pins would all have to be upstairs!" Martha exclaimed, and looked at Clifford. But as usual he was mooning about something. Quicker just to run up for them herself.

Alone and still, he sank deep into the dream that was more real to him than his actual life; his dream of love and pain, dark, warm, and bright as blood.

Martha came back, and pinned the cretonne bluebird to the lampshade. "There! Look, dear! Give me the benefit of your artistic eye! Do you like it better with, or without? Ethel said we ought to have it because of the bluebird of happiness, I thought that was quite cute of her. You know, dear, I couldn't help feeling sorry for poor Ethel when she was raving about Earl this afternoon. It's funny how people confide in me—it's probably just a sort of happenchance, but it really is funny—I'm sure I don't know why they do, except I suppose they sort of feel that I understand."

CHAPTER XL

CLIFFORD had begun really to see Evie's beauty, the soft firmness of her velvety cheeks and throat, her colour and freshness. He loved the way she laughed at his jokes, out loud, her red mouth open. Her appreciation warmed him, her attitude of live and let live relaxed him. When he was with her he was alive and at ease, free of the mingled irritation and propitiation he felt towards Martha, and the paralyzing desire to please with which Cathleen filled him. It was restful to look down instead of up.

Before his marriage he had kissed her now and then, when it seemed the polite thing to do, or when Cathleen had hurt him. Now he never kissed her, for, as he often assured himself, he was loyal to Martha, no matter how tired she made him. But when he and Evie accidentally touched each other, he was electrically aware.

After Martha's frequent surprise visits to the studio, he and Evie never mentioned her, but they felt like guilty children in league with each other.

Though he still condescended, Evie began to know he needed her, and in the warmth of the knowledge all her barriers melted. In the past she had forced herself to discount every kind word he had given her, she had

answered flippantly, had made herself hard; but now, since he was married and she need not be afraid of making him think she was after him, she let herself go. She had no longer any fear or pride.

She had always been bitterly jealous of Cathleen, but she could not be of Martha. She was just sorry for Clifford; a little triumphant over Cathleen, who hadn't held him, after all; and amused by Martha's airs of triumph.

The plans she had begun to make for a life of goodness, reforming her home, being a wonderful, kind sister and daughter, faded away. They were no longer important; she was too happy, now, to bother about being good.

Clifford was showing her how to make a ballet dancer that could kick, from his rolled-up handkerchief, one afternoon, when Martha came into the studio. Their heads were close together, their hands were touching, when she entered, dressed in her best—the tan crêpe of her trousseau, her Orienta pearls. Clifford and Evie jumped apart. Clifford turned scarlet, Evie said: "Goodness!" and put her hand over her mouth.

Martha gave her a cold inclination of the head.

"Why, hello, Martha ——"

"I'm going to the Woman's Club with Mother Hunter, Clifford, and I'm late because I waited up to the last minute for the man to come about the icebox. I suppose you *did* tell him? You promised to."

"Didn't he come?"

"Did you tell him?"

"Why—uh ——"

"Really, Clifford! Here I've been sitting wasting my time waiting, and keeping your mother waiting ——"

"I'm awfully sorry ——"

Martha folded her lips.

"Don't you want me to run you and mother over to wherever it is?"

"No, thank you. I wouldn't think of interrupting your *work.*"

Evie stole a glance at Clifford as Martha went out, Clifford stole a glance at Evie, and quickly looked away.

"Gosh, I ought to have remembered about the icebox! I certainly don't blame Martha for being sore!"

Evie let fly the leg of the little handkerchief dancer in a beautiful kick. She couldn't help laughing, and Clifford began to laugh with her. Their spirits reacted into wild hilarity.

They got back to work at last. Evie mounted the twelve photographs of Winfred Cater, six with folded arms, six with temple propped on forefinger, while Clifford, trying not to think of Martha, finished developing five blurs and a blank that were Junior Robinson's attempts to snapshot his new puppy. Then they went out to sit on the studio steps in the late afternoon sun, feel-

ing safe because Martha and Mrs. Hunter were at the Woman's Club.

"Come on, Boy Scout! Do your good deed for the day and give me a cigarette."

Her hand, holding the cigarette, his, holding the match, trembled. They touched, they pressed together, and were steady. He said breathlessly:

"I nearly set fire to your eyelashes. You ought to have them bobbed."

"Gee, your father has a pretty garden. Those lilies are awfully pretty."

They looked at Mr. Hunter's white lilies, at the strong thrust of anthers covered with powdery gold, and as they looked the petals of one swelling bud quivered apart, curled back a little. Their eyes met as if they had seen a miracle.

"Gee, that was pretty, Clifford!"

"You love beautiful things, don't you, Evie?"

"I don't know. I guess so."

She wanted to cry, but only because she was happy. She pressed her hands down on the steps, so that he shouldn't see they were shaking.

"I wish you could have seen some art photographs I saw in New York. They might shock some people, but they were beautiful if you looked at them the right way."

"How do you mean? Ris—ris ——"

"Risqué? No—well, of course, some people would think so. Kind of classical, like statues of nymphs and things, only real people, on rocks by the sea, and some with big balloons, like bubbles. Of course Pine Hill would die of shock, I couldn't try it here, and anyway, where could I get a model? I bet I could take some beauties, though, if I had a chance; I'd love to try some, just to send to exhibitions. But what I wondered was whether you'd pose for me in that classical costume? The Spirit of the Dogwood one?"

"The old cheesecloth? Sure. I'll do anything I can to help you, any time, Clifford."

"You're awfully sweet, Evie." He put his arm behind her, and she leaned back, heavy and weak with happiness and love.

"I want to try taking some up by the waterfall. Are you doing anything tomorrow afternoon?"

"It's Saturday, isn't it? I told Leo Banks I'd go to the movies, but I'll get out of it."

"Would you? That's wonderful of you, Evie, I certainly would appreciate it. I'll do something for you some day. I'll stop for you round two o'clock. It's grand in the woods just now."

At supper Martha would not meet his eyes; her lips were tight. He tried to propitiate her.

"Have an interesting program?"

"I couldn't enjoy it, I had such a headache."

"Why don't you go right to bed? I'll do the dishes."

"Dear me! How kind! Why these sudden attentions?"

"Well, I just ——"

"I wouldn't think of allowing you to do anything this evening, after seeing how hard you work at the studio!"

"Oh, now, listen, Martha, we were just ——"

"I wasn't aware that I was accusing you of anything, I was simply remarking that it was no wonder you couldn't remember to ask the man about the icebox, with all the business you have on your mind!"

"I ——"

"Of course I couldn't expect you to remember a promise to *me* ——"

"Please ——"

"But I'll tell you one thing, Clifford Hunter, I'm just about sick of it! I work and *work* to have things nice, and make a lovely home for you, and you can't even remember to do *one* little thing to help me! I suppose you think I en*joy* working all day, and standing over a hot stove, and following around cleaning up after you, when I'm just about ready to fly to *pieces,* I'm so tired, and all the thanks I get is, why do you bother? Do you think I'm doing it for my*self?* Not that I expect to be thanked, goodness knows I know better than to expect *that* ——"

"Why, Martha, I think you're ——"

"Oh, now, *look,* you've got raspberry stain on the doily!"

"Please listen ——"

"I've *got* to try to get it out! That lovely set, that Mrs. Brown embroidered herself—I get so discouraged! *Don't,* Clifford, you're only making it worse."

No one *imagines* how patient I am with Clifford, she thought, wanting to scream.

She would not let him help with the dishes, she answered in a muted voice; and when he forced himself to put his arm around her, because he felt guilty, she shrank away.

When she came into the living room and began to fuss again because his feet were up on the sofa, he had to draw himself together, his tense nerves hidden under a quietness so complete that it was violent.

She went to bed early, insulted because he said he wasn't ready, and was going to sit up and read.

He had drawn up a list of books by which he meant to improve himself. Between the bronze heads of Dante, a wedding present from Ethel Brown, were the poems of Keats and of Edna St. Vincent Millay, and "Midsummer Night's Dream," all his, "The Story of Philosophy," that Martha was dipping into, and a gift edition of the poems of Rabindranath Tagore. He couldn't help feeling that few tables in Pine Hill could make such a showing.

He settled down with "Midsummer Night's Dream."

"The Moon, methinks, looks with a watery eye,
And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,
Lamenting an enforcéd chastity."

"An enforcéd chastity." He thought of Martha's shrinking from him. Not just tonight. Ever since their wedding her attitude towards the physical side of marriage had been one of resentment and endurance. She wounded his pride unbearably. We might have had something, he thought. I did want to make her happy. I was fond of her, I thought she loved me. I know now that she didn't—but why did she marry me? And why does she have a fit if I even look at another woman?

He was trapped, so that he could never be alone, and never escape from loneliness.

He tried to go on with his book. He lit another cigarette, turned another page. But what had he read?

He couldn't stay indoors. He went out into the moonlight, where every leaf and petal was dew-drenched. "Weeps every little flower," he said to himself, pleased through his misery to be quoting Shakespeare so aptly and easily. He could see Martha's flower-stakes from The Gifte Shoppe, topped with painted wooden orioles, bluejays, and cardinal birds, with the foxgloves strangled back against them. Pussy flowed through the grass, stalking a moth, disappeared into the shadows, treading her secret paths behind the hedges.

As Clifford went through the meadows the water of the pond shone with an inward silver light, as if another moon lay beneath it. In the woods he heard the running stream, he felt beneath pine needles and moss the slow strong roots reaching down, reaching out, hungering and thirsting in darkness and silence.

CHAPTER XLI

EVIE gave up a dance at The Idle Hour in Hamilton on Friday night, telling Lester Thomas that she had a headache, and not caring whether he believed her. She got out her classical cheesecloth from the box where she kept it, with violet sachêt in its folds because she had worn it to pose as The Spirit of the Dogwood for Clifford. That had been a chilly day in Spring, and she had caught a bad cold, but Clifford had said she looked nice in it.

She washed her hair, that went into feathery ringlets after a shampoo, and manicured her nails, finishing them with glittering dark pink varnish. Fortunately she was alone in the house, and didn't have to avoid explanations.

It was too beautiful a night to stay indoors. Lighting one of Clifford's kind of cigarettes, for it comforted her to be like him in any little way, or to do anything he had ever done, she walked up the road through the warm still air. This afternoon. His hand against hers, his arm behind her. For a moment his cheek had touched hers. Tomorrow ——

But she tried not to think of tomorrow, for fear of making it not come true. He will have forgotten, she told herself. Or else it will rain.

She had come to the studio. It must be late, for the Hunter house was dark. She went into the garden to look at the lilies again, in the moonlight. She ran her hands lightly up their smooth swelling throats, she followed with a finger the outward curve of opened petals. Tears filled her eyes, turning the lilies into blurred faint light.

Of course she was happy. He had been wonderful to her this afternoon, they were going to be alone together tomorrow—maybe. But her body ached, each breath hurt her.

Her mother was getting ready for bed when she reached home. Mrs. Davis's face glistened with cold cream, her head was ridged with water-wave combs.

"Have a good time at the dance, Evie? Whatcha wear *that* old thing for? Say, who do you think I and Birdie met in Hamilton? We went to the Jack Gilbert picture, and I noticed this fella starin' in the intermission, Birdie noticed it too, she says: well, I hope that fella knows you again the next time he sees you! So when we come to go out didn't he come too, and tip his hat, and Birdie give me a poke. So he says—say, Evie, joo take my lotion?—Pardon me, haven't we met before? And of course I thought he was just fresh, but come to find out after we got to talkin', he was a fella used to be in the orchestra with your father! He played tenor saxophone —you remember him, dontcha? A very neat dresser, a

big blond fella. But he said he lost heart, there wasn't any future in it. He's in refrigerators now, I guess he's doin' very good, from the way he talked. He took us to the Sugar Bowl—Birdie tagged along too, of course; she hasn't much sense. He wanted to know could he come out, he has an automobile. He remembered you, too. He's goin' to bring a friend tomorrow afternoon, and he wants you and me and them to go somewheres."

"Can't. I've got a date."

"Whatcha doin'?" Mrs. Davis asked, her voice muffled by the crumpled lace-trimmed nightgown going over her head.

"Promised to do some extra work."

"Oh, well, *heav*ens! You can get out of that!"

"No, I promised."

"Promised your sweetie, I suppose! Can't do one little thing your mother wants you to, just because that old Clifford wants to get some free work out of you. Anyways, I think it's the limit runnin' after a married man. 'Tisn't nice! Come on and go tomorrow—I think you're mean if you don't! He said sump'n about goin' to Perrytown for a steak and mushroom dinner. He said he was goin' to bring an awful nice fella. Imagine how dumb to have him sittin' alone in the back seat. Come on and have a little fun!"

"No, I got to work," said Evie, looking down at her hands, powdered and smudged with the yellow pollen of the lilies, and suddenly smiling.

CHAPTER XLII

MRS. JOHNSON happened to be passing as Clifford and Evie went into the woods carrying camera and tripod. She followed them a little way, tiptoeing on moss, hiding behind trees. If they turned around and saw her she would wave, and call to them that she was hunting for maidenhair to put in her fern-dish.

What were they up to? They were a long way ahead of her now, but she could see them clearly from behind her tree, two little figures going down into the ferny glade that came before the thick part of the woods. Evie swung out her free hand, Clifford caught it. Hand in hand they went on, and were hidden.

"Hmmm!" Mrs. Johnson stepped on some maidenhair as she turned back to the road. She had been going to see Mrs. Cater anyway.

"Did you see old Snoopy Johnson?" Evie asked Clifford.

"Did old Snoopy see us?"

"I don't think so, thank the Lord. Look, Clifford! Here's Mrs. Johnson!" She bustled with quick short steps, wagging her shoulders. "Just like an old hen! Cluck, cluck, cluck! Peck, peck, peck!"

"Evie! Here's my grapevine swing! Drop your things and have a ride!" He caught the vine and ran. He looks like a picture of a gypsy, Evie thought. His arms and neck were burned deep golden brown, light and shadow swept across his bare head, his flannel shirt and old corduroy trousers, as he swung. He was so changed in the woods, so full of life.

From looking at him when he was not looking at her, day after day, she had learned him by heart, and when she was away from him could see, as if she were looking at her treasures, the way his eyebrows went, the way his lips met and curved, and the shape of his hands. Yet when she was with him again, she always felt as if she had never really seen him before.

"Now you!" he called. "Hold tight!" He caught her strongly around the waist, ran with her, sent her flying. The thin scarlet silk of her full short skirt fluttered back, moulded close to her body. He caught her and ran with her again, and she swung up until beech leaves swished past her with the sound of water. Screaming, half with laughter, half with fright, she felt the vine slip through her hands, she fell against him so hard that in trying to catch her he staggered, they tumbled in a heap together on the soft moss, and lay panting. She laughed until her eyes were brilliant with tears, tears sparkled on her lashes.

The waterfall was splintered crystal shining through

white smoke. Clifford and Evie had to shout to each other through its roar, but it was fun to shout, to laugh and sing and make a noise. There were tassels of fresh needles, tender liquid green, at the ends of the pine branches that swept across the mouth of the cave, and behind them Evie changed into the classical cheesecloth, while Clifford set up his camera.

"Now, stop laughing, silly! We've got to get to work."

He became brisk and businesslike. "Let's see. Just sit naturally on that rock. Yes, like that, just easy and relaxed. Straighten your back and twist round toward the waterfall—no, keep your legs the way they were. Now look about half way up that pine tree—stop laughing! Keep your eyes there and put your head down—*down*—there, that looks natural. Hold it!"

Trembling with strain, she held it.

"Great! That ought to be a wonder! Now, look, I want you against that laurel bush, kind of breaking through. Push back into it—*way* back! I want some of the dark leaves against your white dress. We ought to get something really artistic. Push your arm sort of *through* the bush, can't you?"

A broken twig ploughed along her under arm, the firm whiteness was marked by beads of blood.

"Oh, Evie, I've made you hurt yourself!"

He held her arm. "It doesn't matter," she said.

"I've hurt you." His hands tightened. "I've hurt you."

"It isn't anything."

"You're beautiful ——"

"Clifford—you know those pictures you told me about —the art photographs? I'll pose for you that way if you want."

"Evie, will you?"

"I'd just as soon, if you want me to."

He had never seen anything so beautiful. His heart nearly shook his body to pieces.

He tried to force himself to be businesslike. There's nothing personal in this, he told himself, squeezing the rubber bulb. It's just art. All the big photographers do it.

"Climb up close against the waterfall. Stand on that rock."

"Ooh! The spray feels funny! But it's wonderful!" She flung up her arms, then hugged herself, looking back at him, laughing. Against the grey rock, the dark moss and grey-green lichens, her body was almost as white as the spray, but a warm, living white, glowingly splashed with sunlight.

"There—now I want one down here, under this tree. Wait! I'll help you!"

He caught her as she slipped from the rock. She was

silkily smooth and firm; her face, thrown back, was framed by soft ruffled hair; her throat swelled. He tingled as if he had had an electric shock; he held her so that she felt his heart thudding.

She broke away.

"Where—where do you want me?"

"Down on the moss, right there—sort of half lying down——"

She looked, in the light that fell through the leaves, as if she lay beneath shallow quivering green water.

He stopped laughing. He dropped down beside her.

"What's the matter, Clifford? Isn't this right?"

"I don't want to take any more pictures—what's the use? What's the use of anything? What's the use of my trying to do anything?"

To his shame, he began to cry. He put his head down to hide his tears.

"What's the *mat*ter with me, Evie?"

She could not speak as he pressed close to her trying to find comfort and companionship in almost an insanity of loneliness. She put her arms around him, wanting to draw into her own heart all his confused pain. Saying nothing, she kissed him, held his head tight to her firm tender breasts. The touch of him melted her to exquisite aching weakness, filled her with strength that would be enough—always, she knew—for anything.

Through the spring he had seen the rabbits mating,

birds fluttering their wings and screaming, squawking, screeching over their love affairs, too innocent to be decent. He had seen the winged pine pollen filling the air with faint yellow clouds; the phallic upthrusts of the plants from the unresting life beneath the earth. Now, on this day of fragrance and sweet sudden heat, he and she were part of the vital essence, were electric with life, together, and completed.

He lay with his closed eyes pressed against her, almost asleep. He never wanted to move again.

When at last she stirred in his arms, he said: "Evie?" and she answered him gently, wildly, with broken words.

He opened his eyes. The laurel leaves arching above glistened like water where the sun struck them. Their gleaming veined dark surfaces, the softer grey-green linings, the shadow leaves flickering on Evie's body, became part of him. He saw the colours and patterns of the moss they lay on, the vivid sprinkle of light green on dark, tiny star-like ferns spread flat. Everything was clear as if it had been washed with rain, there was not one dimming grain of dust.

"We ought to go."

"Yes ——"

She stood, white against green. He saw the prints of ferns and tiny twigs on her body.

The bushes held them as they went towards home,

caught at their clothes. "Evie ——" he said as they came to the edge of the woods.

"What, Clifford?"

"Oh, you know ——"

"I know. I do know."

"Evie. Kiss me goodbye."

CHAPTER XLIII

YAWNING, he stumbled upstairs to wash his hands and brush the bits of dead leaves out of his hair. He wanted to throw himself down and go to sleep, but Martha was calling: "Clif-*ford!* Supper, honey!"

Still drowsy and entranced, he ate and yawned, trying to follow what Martha was saying, drifting away in the middle of a sentence. The telephone rang.

"I'll go, dear, you're tired." He heard her cry brightly: "Why, hello, Mrs. Johnson!" He became violently awake, he strained to hear.

"Just fine, thank you. How are *you? Has*n't it been lovely? Why, aren't you sweet! It isn't anything like as good as yours, I'm sure—yes—mm-hm—yes, that's just the way I do—the main thing you have to be careful of is not to catch on the bottom. The watermelon rind kind of chunky, and the cucumber rings very thin. No, I haven't, but Mother Hunter has some lovely ones she's selling to some of the ladies for the sand-box—sand-box—*you* know, the sand-box fund. They want it for modelling the Holy Land in the Infant Room. I'm sure she'll be—not at all! Well, that's—not a bit! I feel highly complimented. Yes, indeed, he's fine—I certainly will! Why, no! No, I was right here all afternoon. Yes, *he*

was. Well, he couldn't have seen—*all* right! Not at all, thank *you*. Bye-bye."

She came back. "Goodness! Mrs. Johnson just about *lives* on the phone! Sweet cucumber conserve! As if that couldn't have waited! She says she saw you this afternoon and she thought I was with you. I always said that lady saw a lot that wasn't so. She absolutely insisted that I was with you, and then she said, well, anyway, *some*one was. She says you wouldn't speak to her, you seemed very much occupied. She says to tell you she was *deep*ly hurt, but she forgives you. Where does she get all her notions? You were by yourself, weren't you, dear?"

"Yes—oh, wait a minute, let's see! Oh, no, *now* I remember! Evie Davis was helping me carry the things. I had the big camera and tripod and all, Papa wanted a new set of Sylvan Postcards. I guess that's what she saw."

"Well, look out!" said Martha good-naturedly. "She'll be saying you've eloped, first thing you know. Guess what I made for dessert. Icecream! Doesn't that sound good this warm night?"

What had Mrs. Johnson seen? What was she up to? And why should Martha choose this evening, of all evenings, to be gentle, affectionate, understanding, after having been moody and aloof for days? While they ate their icecream he tried to provoke her into being disagree-

able, so that he need not feel so guilty. When she asked him what subjects he had chosen for his photographs, he was sulky and secretive. But all she would say was, sympathetically, that he was tired. Then, in a sudden panic for fear she would suspect something, he became breathlessly bright and pleasant.

Sitting alone on the porch steps, staring at the big moon, still yellow and low in the sky, while Martha washed the dishes, he tried to assure himself that now he was the man he had always meant to be. A man who took all of life, experiencing everything, and making no explanations or apologies. But he only felt young and scared.

He had not felt so young, so helpless, so guiltily frightened, since the long ago time when he had stolen Miss May's penknife. He had brought an apple to school, to give her; he offered it in the hall, and she told him to leave it on her desk. Good and important, he had gone into the empty school-room, and put it on the brown blotter. He could still see everything—the long ridged apple, pale yellow, and not very shiny in spite of breathing and rubbing; the pencils, freshly sharpened and smelling of cedar; Miss May's dear little pearl-handled knife, flaked with pink and green, and his own hand going out to it.

He only meant to touch its cool smoothness; then he only meant to pretend for a minute that it was his; and

then it was in his pocket, and Miss May had come in, and he couldn't put it back. All morning he was conscious of it, he kept putting in his hand to feel it, and he asked to leave the room so often, just to have a look at it, that Miss May finally refused permission. By the time he reached home he had almost made himself believe that it was his own, he almost believed the story he told himself about finding it on the sidewalk. He went out to play after supper, under the lilac bush. He could smell the lilacs now, he could see the small pale mauve stars on the bare ground under the bush, and the knife lying among them. "Look what I found!" he whispered to himself, pretending he had never seen it before.

He was frightened all day, but only that someone would find out, and take the knife away from him. It wasn't until he was in bed, in the dark, that he realized he was a sinner, that God would punish him. Thou shalt not steal.

But it was Miss May's fault, for leaving the knife lying there. It was Papa's and Mama's fault for not giving me a knife, when I wanted one so badly ——

He hated the knife, he wished he had never seen it.

"Thou shalt not steal."

Slap! went the screen door, bringing him back from the past. Martha sat down beside him, and slipped her hand through his arm; Pussy curled up, purring, against his other side.

It had not seemed right or wrong in the woods, only natural. But now he was miserable. He wished he had never seen Evie. He stole a sidelong glance at Martha, so neat in her nice pongee, with her glasses catching the moonlight.

"Isn't it a sweet night, dear?"

"Uh-huh—fine."

"You comfy?" She snuggled against him. "My, that old moon makes me feel quite sentimental! Isn't this nice, just the two of us?"

He made a guilty assenting sound.

The telephone rang.

"Mercy! That phone! You only have to sit down to have it begin ringing! Well, I'm *com*ing!"

He strained again to hear.

"No, not doing a *thing*—that'll be just fine and dandy! All righty—that'll be lovely. Bye-bye." The screen door slapped again. "Mother and Father Hunter are coming over, dear."

Mr. and Mrs. Hunter and Martha rocked together, speaking quietly and contentedly because the air was so warm and fragrant, the moonlight so lovely; while Clifford crouched on the step, forcing himself to answer, stretching his mouth into smiles.

"Everybody happy?" Martha almost sang. "Hasn't it been a perfect day?"

"It must have been pretty in the woods, son. Mrs.

Johnson said she saw you going in with Evie Davis. There's not much that lady *don't* see. Hm? Oh, I thought you said something."

"Well, the double-faced old thing!" Martha exclaimed. "So she knew it was Evie Davis all the time! When she phoned me she was letting on that she thought it was me! You know, I believe she just wanted to make trouble. As if Clifford and I didn't tell each other everything!"

"Evie was helping me carry the camera things," Clifford explained breathlessly.

"That was nice of her, Saturday afternoon," said Mr. Hunter; and Mrs. Hunter added:

"Well, I'm afraid Mrs. Johnson's hopes for a scandal are doomed to disappointment this time. I believe really that's why she called up, but she pretended it was about cucumbers."

"*I* know. She phoned me, too. I told her I thought you might be willing to sell some for the sand-box fund. It's a new thing to have *her* asking how to make something, she generally thinks she knows better than anyone else. Remember the time she told you how you ought to make Washington pie, Mother Hunter?"

"Yes, after she'd had three helps!" Mrs. Hunter replied indignantly. "Don't talk about Mrs. Johnson to me! I wonder how her conserve'll turn out? She's sure to put something queer in it—will you ever forget the

tea icecream she served the time she had the Just Sew Club?"

"Oh, that reminds me! Wouldn't you folks like some cream? There's some left in the freezer. No, don't bother, dear, I know just where everything is. You stay and visit with Mother and Father."

She backed out of the screen door, carefully holding the tray of saucers.

Mrs. Hunter, rocking and eating, slipped her heels out of her pumps, thinking Martha hadn't enough vanilla in her icecream, and that after all the marriage had turned out very well, in spite of her worrying. Surreptitiously she unhooked her waistband under her blouse. It popped apart, and she relaxed comfortably.

Martha, crooking her little finger, and eating the smallest helping slowly, to make it last as long as the others, felt herself the perfect wife and daughter, making everyone who came near her happier. Martha is sweet to the old people, she imagined someone saying. They simply adore her. "Well, how's the garden these days, Father Hunter?" she asked.

"I have fourteen blooms on one spike of lilies," said Mr. Hunter. He was pleased to think about his lilies, to be eating icecream, to be with Clifford. The moon was beautiful, too. "Funny to think of that old moon pulling the tides in and out," he said.

"I *know!*" Martha answered, brightly and kindly. "Papa was always so much interested in it."

A dead world, white in the sky, Clifford thought, pulling the tides in and out, showing the little hairs on Pussy's ears, his father's old neatly polished shoes and wrinkled socks, the tulips, blurred by melted icecream, on his saucer. And suddenly the thought of Cathleen sprang from the painted tulips—he couldn't remember why. But the thought of her was latent in everything; even in dull things, crazy things. In beautiful things, of course. The moon always made him want her, although it was sometimes a conscious effort to remember and long. But from so many sources the thought of her sprang unexpectedly. Just now, these tulips; the smell of his cigarette. Even when Mrs. Johnson telephoned, he had called wordlessly: Cathleen! Help me! For she would have made Mrs. Johnson funny, instead of threatening.

If it had been Cathleen, instead of Evie, this afternoon, he would be utterly happy, proud, strong, ready to face anything.

He grew impatient of them, Martha, his mother, his father, for sitting laughing, talking, asking questions that he had to answer; as if they were real people leading real lives, as if anything they did could possibly matter. Under his breath, drowned by their talk, he sent out his cry that he knew would never be answered: "Cathleen ——"

Lying in the dark beside sleeping Martha, he shook with nervous chills. He wished the night was over—he wished the next day would never come.

He never wanted to see Evie again.

It was her fault, taking off her clothes. I never asked her to. No, it was my fault, just as much. But I never would have, never, if Martha hadn't been so cold.

Anyway, what was he getting so worked up about? Something that might happen to anyone. Merely an incident in a man's life.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

He would not think of the Bible.

"Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedar, and the rafters of fir."

Memory swept over him, breathlessly lovely. Soft roar of falling water, curve of fern above a white body lying on green moss ——

Cathleen lying on the moss, holding him close in tenderly passionate arms.

But it had been Evie. Never again, he thought. If I get out of this without being caught, I'll never do anything wrong again as long as I live. He covered up the radiant light, the liberation; smothered it, shrouded it.

CHAPTER XLIV

ON SUNDAY the rain began, and through the night, kept awake by her happiness, Evie heard it drumming. When she reached the studio on Monday Mr. Hunter was looking sadly at his lilies. They had been soaked until they were transparent, one or two lifted trumpets were full of water and drowned insects. "I ought to have photographed them when they were perfect," he told her. "I meant to. That one with fourteen blooms on the one spike, I ought to have photographed that Saturday, when it was perfect. I never thought about its getting spoiled so soon. Well—that's life."

"Sure, that's life," Evie answered, trying to make her joyous voice sound sympathetic.

"Want a posy for the counter? I notice you seem to like 'em." He cut her two solid white roses, and an orange one, loose and fragile on a delicate thorny stem. Raindrops rolled around in the shell-shaped petals like balls of quicksilver.

She blew gently into the orange rose, it stirred open to show a pale gold heart, and closed again.

Her fingers tingled as she filled a tumbler with water, and put the roses in it. She sang under her breath, she couldn't keep her eyes from the door.

Clifford was pleasant and friendly when he came in. He didn't want her to realize that he had turned against her. He wanted to let her down easily. But she asked, suddenly afraid:

"What's the matter, Clifford?"

"Nothing. Not a thing!"

The light drained from her face.

"Have you seen my shears, Evie? It's funny where they get to, they seem to take a pleasure in hiding themselves ——"

"Clifford, what's the matter?"

"I told you nothing was the matter. You're the—the ——"

I must be decent to her, he told himself. I will be. He tried again.

"You're the best little pal a fellow ever had, and nobody's ever been sweeter to me!" The words were all right, but even to his ears his voice was unconvincing. "Everything's fine and dandy, and you mustn't be a silly little girl, imagining things."

Why did she look at him that way? He turned from her, and lit a cigarette. "Well, you've made the place look very festive this morning, with those roses!" He bent, pretending to smell them, holding his breath.

"You despise me now, don't you?"

"Of course not. That's a ridiculous idea. I told you

everything was fine and dandy. Oh, *here* my shears are! Well, I guess I'd better get busy!"

Pleasant and friendly, he took his work to the dark-room; and when he had finished he called his father in from the garden to ask his advice. He was careful not to be left alone with Evie.

He brought her a present from Hamilton next day, a shawl made of thin crinkled green silk, like a young beech leaf. But he would not meet her eyes.

"You needn't have given me a present, Clifford."

"It isn't anything. It's just a little token of appreciation for all the help you've been in my work. Just a little thank you."

She flushed slowly, burningly.

"I didn't want you to give me anything."

"Why, that's all right!" he said brightly, loathing himself. "Wonder if Papa wants me to go to town for those art mats? I think I'd better just go out and ask him." He was terrified that she would say something. But she was folding the shawl, carefully, slowly, her head down. He could not see her face, but her open blouse showed throat and chest still dyed scarlet. Well, she might have shown a little appreciation, he told himself. Oh, my God, why should she? It was a wonder she didn't throw it in my face.

I ought to say something to her, and I can't. I ought

to tell her that she can always depend on me, if it ever gets out, or anything.

Well, the least I can do is play the game and let her down easy, he thought, safe in the Ford, going to Hamilton for art mats. If she says anything, I'll just have a perfectly frank friendly talk with her, and tell her how much I regret the way I behaved. I'll tell her I respect her just exactly as much as ever, and that it was all my fault. It was, partly. Oh, God, I wish I'd never seen her.

But as long as she said nothing, there was no use bringing up the subject. And through the week she did not speak of it, she hardly spoke at all, but went about her work, remote and detached.

He forced himself to go on being pleasant and friendly, in spite of her lack of response. In time he began to breathe more easily. I don't believe it made as much of an impression on her as it did on me, he told himself. After all, everyone knew that Evie Davis had had plenty of affairs. She had always had the reputation of being free and easy.

CHAPTER XLV

AT FIRST he thought he would destroy the plates of the photographs, but curiosity was too strong, and he developed them next Sunday, while Martha was at church. Their beauty startled him. He could not throw them away. He would hide them, and when he had gotten over feeling so sick about the affair he would look at them again, for they were everything he had ever dreamed of doing, only better.

He put them first under the paper in his bureau drawer. But the bulge seemed unsafe. So he hid them in a box in the attic, piling other boxes on top, boxes that held Mr. Simpson's winter underwear, unpublished manuscripts, and sea-shells.

Martha, on a hot July afternoon a few weeks later, wanted a box for the clothes she was sending to the coloured mission. She hunted in the attic, and sang as she hunted.

"I love you truly, truly, dear ——"

She must give the attic a good cleaning out some day soon. All these boxes full of heaven knew what.

"Life with its *sun*-shine, *life* with its tear ——"

Poor Papa's old underclothes. She might just as well give them away now. The sea-shells he had considered so valuable, and his manuscripts, could go into the smaller box beneath. That had nothing in it but some photographs.

She had not seen the photographs before. That Evie Davis in Grecian costume, sitting on a rock. Still, it was very pleasing, just considered as an art study. She slid out the next one.

Evie, naked, crouching among ferns. Evie, naked, standing against a waterfall.

Blood rushed to Martha's head, roared in her ears. So that was what he was doing, sneaking off to the woods? That, and what else? Mrs. Johnson's hints came back to her, Mrs. Cater's. And she had never suspected a thing, she had trusted him.

She squatted in the attic, shaking with shock and anger. Clifford and Evie had been laughing at her while they insulted her. Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Cater and all Pine Hill had been laughing at her for being so easy. She peered at the photographs again, jealous of Clifford, jealous of Evie's beauty, wanting to be hurt more, more. She found a strange pleasure in this pain. She had never felt so important.

She was boiling inside, really boiling, like water in a kettle; seething, lifting. Through the singing in her ears she heard a shout from below: "Butcher!" She

pushed the photographs back into the box, and hurried downstairs, pausing for a look in the bathroom mirror. She was astonished to see that she looked the same as usual; that Mr. Kremer did not stare curiously at her when she came out.

Pussy came, too, and stood up, her velvet forepaws treading Mr. Kremer's white apron, her mouth open in soundless mews.

Martha was able to talk sensibly, looking into the shadowy wagon where red and white meat dangled from hooks on the sides. The mixed smell of meat and Mr. Kremer's cigar stub disgusted her as usual. She watched the quivering arrow of the scales as keenly as ever. But going back to the kitchen with her plate of chops and liver, she found that her legs were trembling so that she had to lean against the porch lattice. A spray of morning-glories touched her cheek coolly.

She had read in the book on Popular Psychology on the list the lecturer at the Woman's Club had recommended that after an emotional shock one sometimes noticed details with an unusual vividness. It was true. For she had never really seen the stars that rayed from the white funnels into the clear light blue petals, covered with tiny drops from the morning's shower; the buds wrapped like dolls' umbrellas; and the tendrils like little bedsprings. She felt she would never be able to look at morning-glories again without being sick.

I am feeling this terribly, she thought. Her steps, as she tottered to the kitchen, were a little slower than they need have been.

She had been so happy in her dear white and Delft blue kitchen. It, too, was betrayed; and all the security, the contentment it stood for.

"Did you want to comfort poor Missy, then?" she whispered, trying to gather up Pussy. But curved white claws shot out from the pink pads, Pussy stiffened and struggled until Martha let her jump down, then ran to the screen door and stood mewing to be let out.

What should she do? Martha asked herself. She could leave Clifford; but did she want to? Would it be right? Certainly divorce was wicked. If he was properly sorry, perhaps it would be her duty to forgive him. But she would insist on that girl being sent away.

She went to the telephone, and called her mother-in-law in a voice so low and groaning that Mrs. Hunter could not understand a word. Speaking more clearly, Martha asked her to come over at once.

Then she began to cry. When Mrs. Hunter arrived Martha looked at her with wet red eyes over the damp wad of handkerchief she pressed to her mouth.

"Has something happened to Clifford?"

Martha shook her head, nodded, gasped: "Oh! Oh—oh!" and showed the photographs.

Mrs. Hunter, weak with relief, could have shaken

her, shaken Clifford, shaken Evie. "For Heaven's *sake,* Martha! The next time you want to scare me to death ——!"

"It *couldn't* be worse!" Martha sobbed indignantly.

"Now, Martha, stop crying; you'll make yourself sick. Oh, that idi*ot*ic boy!"

"Don't you think they've been *wick*ed?"

"I think they've been terribly foolish—yes, these are horrid, of course." She turned the photographs down, wrinkling her nose. "I never could bear that Evie, and she must have put him up to it. I suppose he thought he was being artistic—there are pictures like these—ugh!—in all those awful art magazines he thinks are so wonderful. But it could be a lot worse. I suppose most artists' wives have to put up with this sort of thing, and Clifford always had an idea he was an artist."

"Of course I can't go on living with him, after this."

"You'll have to do whatever you think is right about that," said Mrs. Hunter, making Martha gaze at her incredulously, and then burst into fresh sobs. Mrs. Hunter wanted to slap her, but more than that she wanted to protect Clifford, though she would have liked to slap him, too.

"I don't know what else they may have done!"

"Not a *thing.* You can be sure of that. I know Clifford." But if he did, you could thank yourself, his mother thought. For she and Martha had worn on each

other's nerves a little; even when they were being sweet to each other irritation quivered through their voices. Martha thought Mother Hunter hadn't brought Clifford up right. Mrs. Hunter thought Martha was finicking and a hypochondriac; a born old maid.

"Now, Martha, we mustn't breathe a word to a soul. Of course I'll make Mr. Hunter send that girl away. But we don't want to give anyone anything to talk about. Mrs. Johnson has been hinting things all over town already."

"They're all *laugh*ing at me ——"

"Nonsense! No one's even thinking about you."

Martha began to wail.

"Martha, stop it! You're getting hysterical! Wash your face and lie down and rest, unless you think you'd feel better working at something—*I* would, I know." I'm sorry for the poor thing, she thought, but if I once get sympathetic there'll be no stopping her. She hasn't any backbone. Certainly she can't be as much upset as his own mother, but I'm not weeping and wailing. Poor Clifford! *He's* going to have a time! What po*ssessed* him? I must warn him before he comes home.

Pretending not to hear Martha's sniffing and gasping, she said with affected cheerfulness:

"Now, everything's going to be all right! I'll just run along home and have a little talk with Mr. Hunter."

CHAPTER XLVI

EVIE saw Mrs. Hunter coming across the grass to the studio. Under the black umbrella she was using for a sunshade her face was as purple as if she were going to have a sunstroke. Her grey house dress was belted low with a narrow strip tied in the back, the short ends hanging from her broad behind like an elephant's tail, Evie thought, as out loud she said politely: "It certainly is hot, isn't it, Mrs. Hunter?" And in spite of Mrs. Hunter's unresponsive face, she went on trying to be polite. "I kind of think there's going to be a storm, don't you? The air's—so ——"

Her voice trailed uncertainly to silence as Mrs. Hunter stood looking at her.

"Where is Mr. Hunter?"

"He went to Hamilton, Mrs. Hunter."

"And Clifford?"

"He—Clifford went with him."

"Well, I want a little talk with you, anyway." Mrs. Hunter pulled her pleated circular black linen fan out of its tube, and flapped it violently.

Evie braced herself. She was alone, there was no one to help her.

"I have to speak of something very painful. My son's

wife has found some photographs of you. No! I don't want to hear about them. I blame my son as much as I do you. But that sort of thing can't go on."

She was going to try to be fair, but, looking at this painted girl with imitation pearls as big as moth-balls in her ears, remembering past gossip about her, she couldn't keep her voice from being cold and hard.

Evie felt behind her for the counter, and held on to it.

"There's been plenty of talk going on about you and Clifford, but I wouldn't listen. I *could*n't believe it," Mrs. Hunter continued. She looked calm and impassive, except for the frantic agitation of her fan. "Not after the way Mr. Hunter has tried to be so kind to you."

"I know he has. I—I'm much obliged."

"But since I've seen those photographs—well, it seems to me you've chosen a funny way to show your gratitude! Weren't there enough others, so you could have left Clifford alone?"

"I—we didn't ——"

"Please! I don't want to hear what you did or did not do. Those pictures!" Her nose jerked. She couldn't help it. "They are more than enough. Mr. Hunter takes you in and does everything for you, and in return you do your best to break up his son's home."

"I don't see why. It wasn't Clifford's fault, *hon*est, Mrs. Hunter. He never wanted to. I was the one that suggested it."

"That I can well imagine. But no matter which of you had the idea, Clifford is the one who is going to suffer for it."

"Oh, *no!* I don't want to hurt anyone. I just—I ——"

"Mrs. Johnson—everybody—tried to warn me, but I couldn't believe that my own son ——"

"I *told* you it was me!"

"There's no use being defiant, Evie. *That* isn't going to help matters."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

Mrs. Hunter looked at her in silence. Evie took her hands from the counter, and threw back her head.

"If you mean you want me to leave, that suits me all right. I *want* to go. Only I don't want to put Mr. Hunter to inconvenience."

"I'm speaking for Mr. Hunter, and for Clifford, too. I don't want to be unkind, Evie, but surely you can see for yourself that if you are sincere in wanting to make things easier for Clifford, there is only one thing for you to do."

"All right, I said I'd go, didn't I? But if I do go, will it be all right for him—for Clifford—then?"

"It will be a long way from being all right. Things aren't fixed *that* easy, unfortunately. But it would be better. Martha is terribly upset, poor thing, and seeing you round isn't going to help things."

"You mean she'd take it out on Clifford? But that isn't *fair!* She isn't fair to him, anyway!"

"Really, you'll have to excuse me from discussing my daughter-in-law with you."

"Listen, Mrs. Hunter. You and Martha don't understand. It wasn't like what I guess she thinks. You tell her so. Clifford hasn't any use for me, he never had. He was real nice to me always, just like Mr. Hunter was, but he never cared a thing about me, except just like he'd be nice to anyone. You tell Martha that."

"I don't think there is anything else we need discuss. I think you are doing the best thing for your own sake."

"All right. I'm *glad* to go. I've been wanting to, anyway."

"If you need time to look for another place ——"

"No, I don't."

"Then I suppose you would rather go right away?"

"Yes, I guess so."

Mrs. Hunter struck her fan a sharp blow. It shot into its tube with a rustle and snap. "If you want to go now, I'll stay until Mr. Hunter comes," she said, and sat down, suddenly aware that her legs were giving way beneath her.

Evie went to the closet and got her hat, her powder, her paper-bound copy of "Once and Forever." "Good-bye," she said, so softly that Mrs. Hunter could pretend

not to have heard. "Say goodbye for me to Mr. Hunter and Clifford. And *please* tell Martha."

Earl Mittendorf, with a red tie, and a red rose in his buttonhole, came to take her for a ride in his new two-seater after supper. Evie was glad. It would keep her from thinking for a little while. Her cheeks were brilliant, the soft curls blew back from her forehead. She held her head high, she laughed as they whirled down the main street. Mrs. Johnson, talking across her hedge to Mrs. Weismuller, craned her neck. "Well! *My* goodness! Did you see *that?* Bold as brass, the both of them. Poor Mrs. Mittendorf! She's always giving thanks that her angel Earl never even looks at Evie Davis. I guess Clifford Hunter's old Ford can't compete with a brand new auto with red wheels. I can tell you Earl needn't ask *me* to ride in a loud thing like that!" Noble Davis, standing up to pedal a too-big borrowed bicycle, with Donny crouched on the handle-bar, wobbled out of their way. The little brothers shrieked a mockery of Earl's bugle-note horn. Ethel Brown, feeling the heat on the porch steps, saw them through a blur of tears; but when her mother, rocking and gasping, asked: "Wasn't that Earl and the Davis girl?" she answered: "I don't know, Mama. I didn't notice." Harold Felter and Leo Banks, lounging at the drug-store corner, exchanged glances and burst into loud laughter. Mr. Hunter, in his shirt-sleeves, watering his roses, did not see

them; but Mrs. Hunter did. She had taken her rocking-chair down on the lawn, looking for a breath of air, and was fanning, and sniffing her lavender salts. What a goose she had been to get a sick headache worrying over that girl! She had felt so sorry for her, after Evie had left the studio—and here was Evie tearing along with another man, raising dust enough to choke a body, and without a care in the world!

Evie was thinking: I wish Earl would run into something and kill me. And the next moment she screamed in terror as he almost grazed Mr. McGrath's car, for he was showing off to her.

The air washed past, fragrant with honeysuckle and dying grass; she relaxed a little, faintly comforted by the darkness, and Earl's shaken voice telling her what a sweet kid she was. But when he said what an old devil Mrs. Johnson was, she thought wearily, he knows, too. That's why he came round again. He thinks I'll be easy now. She was not surprised when he stopped the car in a lonely place beside the woods.

"Evie—baby—going to be sweet to me?"

She thought, scornfully, if your Sunday school class could see you now! "Earl, take me home, please," she said. "I hadn't ought to come out tonight."

"Be a sport! Come on! Just a little stroll. You know I'm crazy about you, honey-lamb ——"

"No. Don't. *Don't,* I tell you! *Please* take me home,

Earl. I feel awful funny. I'm afraid I'm sick or something; honest, I feel awful. Take me home."

In bed, rolling her head from side to side on a pillow like hot cinders, she was too wretched, too aching with exhaustion, to sleep. And she was wringing wet. I can't stay in Pine Hill and go on seeing Clifford, she thought. I can't stand it. I'll go away. I'll go and stay at Aunt Min's a while. Clifford won't care. He'll be glad I'm out of the way.

Burying her face in the pillow, she saw him as he had been since that day. Avoiding her, afraid of her. Sick of her.

She got up and stole out into the yard. She wanted to write a letter, telling him everything; that she was going away, that she would love him forever. But someone was asleep in every room in the house.

No, what she really wanted to do was to go to that place where he and she had been together, and drown herself in the pool. But if they found her, Clifford would know it was because of him. She didn't want to make him feel worse than he did already.

She sat on the steps, gasping for air. Beneath her bare feet the grass felt warm and wilted. The night was black. She hardly knew whether the thunder she heard was real, or was the roaring of her own blood.

She was drenched with sweat. She clutched her knees and rocked herself back and forth. He's sick of me, he

hopes I'll go. I will go. I'll go away for good. I'll pretend I'm going for a visit, and then I just won't come back.

Perhaps some day something will happen. Martha might die, or something. Clifford might get to love me ——

No.

Mosquitoes shrilled and whined around her. They bit her so badly that she cried, although nothing else had brought tears. Rain began, spattering down in big warm drops. She went back to bed, and stopped hearing the drumming on the roof as if she had been drugged. She was so deeply asleep in the morning that Mrs. Davis had to shake her to waken her.

"You're goin' to be good and late, my lady."

Evie opened her eyes with difficulty. Her lashes were stuck together. She could hardly breathe.

"Come out o' that tall grass, 'possum! You better hustle!"

"I'm not going. I've left the studio."

"You *have?* Say! What got into you?"

Evie struggled out of bed.

"Oh, nothing. I got sick of it, and quit."

"Mama! The coffee's boilin' over!" Noble shouted from the kitchen.

"Well, take it off, why don't you?" Mrs. Davis shouted back, gathering her dirty pink silk draperies around

her and hurrying out, her mules slapping. "Land's *sakes*——!"

Evie washed her face and pulled on her blue cotton kimono, then followed her mother. On the spotted red and white tablecloth were her brothers' dirty plates, a catsup bottle, a platter of fried meat in congealing grease, and a pressed glass vase of pink paper carnations from the five and ten cent store. Noble was playing "Stop Your Ticklin', Jock!" on the old graphophone with its morning-glory shaped horn. She poured herself some coffee, and sat down, resting her head on her hand, for she was dizzy.

"Say, what happened? Want some meat?"

"Gee, no! Too hot. Oh, nothing. Mrs. Hunter came in and jawed at me, but I was planning to leave anyway."

"*She* jawedja, did she? Say, that one's got a nerve! I wish she'd try it on me, that's what I wish. I'd give my lady back as good as she gave! You had a right to speak up to her."

"I did. I told her I wouldn't be paid to stay in her rotten old place another day."

Harry Lauder's laughter ceased, the record scraped round and round.

"If it'd been me, I'd have told her where she got off; her and her niminy-piminy darlin' boy!"

"If it'd been *me,* you know what I'd have done, doncha?" Noble joined the conversation. "I'd have took

a good ole gun an' I'd have shot her full of bullets, bang! Bang! *Bang!* That's what I'd have done! An' then I'd have took a good ole sword, an' I'd have chopped her head off, that's what I'd have done, all right!" He started the graphophone record again.

"Listen, Mama, I thought I'd go to Philly for a little visit before I started in looking for a new job. Aunt Min won't care if I come. I can go in with Dolores."

"Nothin's wrong, is it, Evie?"

"Mm-mm. Only I want a change. I thought I'd go today. Oh, *Lord,* Noble! Give us a rest from that thing!"

"No-o!"

"Noble's musical, like his papa was," Mrs. Davis said. "Don't pick on your little brother, Evie."

Evie pushed back her cup, went to the bedroom, and began to pack her father's old suitcase. She put in her classical cheesecloth. It was fragrant of violets, but she had torn it badly in the woods.

Mrs. Davis leaned in the doorway. "Whew! It's goin' to be another sizzler, ain't it?" She pushed her boudoir cap up from her forehead. "I don't envy you the train, a day like this."

Automatically Evie powdered her face and neck, leaning towards the mirror; automatically she reddened her red lips.

"Look, Evie, I want to ask you sump'n. If you was me, would you have your eyebrows plucked?"

"What?"

"I said—Noble! For goodness' *sake* don't play that record again!"

"Why-ee?"

"Because Mama says not, that's why! You want a lickin'?"

"What *can* I play-ee, Mama? Mama, what can I play-ee?"

"Oh, play anything except that everlastin' ha ha ha. Would you, Evie? Have your eyebrows plucked?"

"Oh, I don't know. Gee, it's hot!" She pulled on her black satin dress. It was so tight that she nearly smothered before she got her arms into the sleeves.

"Oh, *damn!*"

"Such language," said Mrs. Davis placidly.

"Mama! Mama! Mama!"

"Well, what *is* it, Noble?"

"Can I play 'There Ain't No Flies on Auntie'? Can I, Mama?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake play anything you want!"

Evie pulled on her tight little black hat with two big scarlet roses low on one side, and automatically twisted feathery sickles of hair to curve on her cheeks. She fastened her big scarlet beads.

"I wish you'd leave your choker, Evie. It goes so good

with my flowered chiffon, and Mr. Leech and another gentleman ast Birdie and I to go to Havre de Grace on Saturday."

"You can have my pearls, Mama." For Clifford had said the red beads were like berries. He had told Evie she could catch the birds when they flew to peck at them.

She kissed her mother. "Goodbye, Mama."

"Bye-bye. Be good. Give my love to the folks, and let me know if Min's got any stouter. When you comin' home?"

"Oh, pretty soon, I guess. I'll send you a card. Goodbye, Noble. Tell the others goodbye."

Noble ran after her, his bare feet padding in the dust. "I'll carry your grip for you."

"Let's carry it together."

"Aw, thunder, no! Lemme carry it by myself!" he said offendedly. But it was too heavy for him. They held it between them, awkwardly, because he was so little. It kept bumping into their legs, and almost tripping them.

The air was full of the broken ringing of grasshoppers; everything quivered through heat haze. Noble's round face and thin little neck were streaming. Evie fumbled in her bag. "Here, you get yourself an icecream cone on your way home, to cool off with."

When the car came she hugged him tight, and kissed him. In her heart she was crying: the last time, little brother. I'm frightened! Goodbye——

She looked back, and saw him scrubbing off the kiss on his shoulder.

The car was passing the Hunters' back yard. She caught a glimpse of the studio through a yellow blaze of sunflowers. She squeezed her eyes tight shut, then frantically opened them and strained back to see. But now the drug-store was sliding past, with Fred in his white coat leaning in the doorway. Then the Methodist Church. Already Pine Hill looked detached and indifferent.

She had torn her scarlet chiffon handkerchief, edged with black lace, almost in two without noticing.

There was Mrs. Johnson climbing in, with two big empty market-baskets. Evie kept her face towards the window. When the conductor asked for her fare she was so startled that she was afraid for a second that she was going to faint. She could hear her heart thudding. She could not find her money, her hands shook so, and she was half blind. Lip stick, comb, samples, an article by Elinor Glyn cut out of a movie magazine, some cigarettes, and a little pine cone from the day with Clifford.

Mrs. Johnson put her baskets where each passing person stumbled over them. She looked offendedly at the stumblers; and, between looks at them, peered up and down the car. Pulling out her summer silk from under her arm, between thumb and finger, and giving it little shakes, for the day was hotter than yesterday, she con-

sidered Evie. What was *she* doing, going in to Hamilton in such a get-up on a weekday morning? Nothing troubled that one! All made up like a chorus girl. She had a grip, too. Going away! Maybe Mr. Hunter had come to his senses at last. About time! He certainly had been very foolish over that girl. Maybe Clifford had just been a chip of the old block. Poor Mrs. Hunter! Poor Martha! But no one could say she hadn't warned them.

Evie looked out at the wet yellow of a field of wild mustard, at pine trees running past. The car clattered across the bridge over the stream. She crouched in her seat, pushing down the thought that she would never see Clifford again.

CHAPTER XLVII

UNSURE and panic-stricken, Clifford ploughed through the meadow towards the wood, leaving a dark track behind him, for in the lovely lingering twilight before sunrise bearded grass and yellow flowers were grey with dew.

After hours of listening to Martha's voice, he could hardly believe this quietness. He could hear nothing but mist-hidden cows blowing and breathing, and the mist-hidden brook washing over its pebbles.

He did not know what he was going to do. "But there's one sure thing," he muttered to himself. "I'm never going back to Martha, not if you gave me a million dollars." Her reproaches and tears, his blusterings and lame explanations, had gone on and on, round and round, until, tense with exhaustion, he was staring with strained concentration at her swollen red nose—at the two deeper red marks her glasses had left—at the pinked edges and cut-out circles of the strip of leather across the toe of his shoe. He began to count the circles. Eleven, twelve. "Clifford! Answer me!" He turned his foot to one side. Fourteen holes, but he'd better count again to make sure.

Then she had rushed into the spare room, and locked the door; and he had come out.

"I've made a mess of everything," he said aloud, almost sobbing. "I've spoiled everything. Nothing will ever be right as long as I live."

He thought perhaps he had better kill himself. It would be the one sure way out of this frenzy of exhaustion and bewilderment. Death would be quiet and cool. But he would have to think of some quick easy way. Not shooting. He could not go out of life with a shattering noise. He wanted to be quiet and cool. He could drown himself in the pool under the waterfall. The water there was deep.

The woods were filled with a waiting silence. He stumbled over moss and rotting wood, the mysterious stirring smell of life and death rose to him through his stupor. Aching and trembling from the ugly night, he reached the waterfall, and dropping down on moss and leaf mould, felt himself sinking, slowly and lightly as a leaf through windless air.

Through lifting sleep he heard a call, high, sweet, unearthly. An answer came; another, more distant; until the woods were full of airy voices. He opened his eyes, and saw rising close beside him a little plant. From a ribbed, smoothly swelling leaf ending in a tiny ram's horn twirl hung a globe of dew.

From the pool beneath the waterfall a lesser cascade

poured into a shallower pool. He took off his clothes, and slid into the cool water. Up to the banks of the stream the tree-tops laced together, but here the sky was clear above him. It was flooded with rose, that deepened and brightened as he turned up his face to look. The water, spreading in slow circles, constantly moving, was rosy too, but a rose so crystal that he could see the water-weeds stirring on the bottom, with minnows flashing silver among them, or hanging suspended between earth and air. Lifting his dripping arms, he pushed to the rocks, slippery with moss, pulled himself up on them, and let the little cascade splash and spatter down on his head and shoulders. His passage made small waves lap against the banks where thirsty roots entered the water, and ferns sprang pointed as flames from cracks in the wet black trunks of fallen trees.

Digging his fingers into crevices of the rock, he let his body float out with the pull of the water. Each time he turned from side to side, a tremor ran through the pool.

Rose-colour melted into deep blue, the sun poured slanting heat. He tried to climb out on the bank, falling back with a tremendous splash. Shouting with laughter he beat on the surface, filling the air with silver and snow. The minnows twinkled and vanished. He swung his arms in slow circles under the water; they were followed by

streamers of bubbles. He put his head under, and opened his eyes to the strange waving world.

Floating face down, he saw his shadow on the bottom, distorted, and rimmed with light.

He clutched strong ferns, and scrambled out. His nails were full of black mould, his hands were stained green. Though the heaving water was gold with sunlight now, the woods were in shadow, the plants were firm and cool with night-coolness and dew. Dripping, he pushed through the bushes, and climbed past the higher waterfall, catching springing branches of pine to pull himself up, shouting and laughing. Above the fall he stretched out on a rock in the sun, with his legs in the water that rushed strongly past, gathering itself together for its leap from the rocks. He stared up into the bright sky until he was blind; then, stumbling on to the moss, he fell asleep again.

He woke to hunger and the look of noon. Tingling with refreshed vitality, he got into his clothes and started for home. He was out of the woods before he began to think of his troubles. He had forgotten all about them; forgotten Martha, forgotten Evie, forgotten that he had meant to kill himself.

He looked through the window at the drug-store clock. Half past one. He was hungry, but he wasn't going home. He went in, and climbed up on a stool, twisting his feet through the rungs.

"'Lo there, Clifford! Hot enough for you? Well, what's the order? Same as always?"

"'Lo, Fred. Yep. The usual."

Fred scooped a ball of icecream, poured chocolate syrup over it.

"Anybody sick at your house?"

"No. Why?"

"We just sent over a lot of stuff, spirits of ammonia and like that; Martha sounded very solemn on the phone."

Clifford ate his sundae slowly, from long habit leaving the cherry on top of the whipped cream for last.

"Is Earl going with Evie Davis again?" Fred asked, polishing a glass, and squinting through it to the light. "He bought one of the big gift boxes of mixed chawcluts yesterday. We haven't sold one of them since the time he was giving her such a rush. Nope, 'twasn't for Ethel, she was in this morning for half a pound of car'mels. Well—so long! Don't do anything I wouldn't do!"

Leaden-footed, Clifford went to the studio. His father, with ridged forehead, and spectacles on end of nose, was rummaging among the stock of framed friendship mottoes for Mrs. Cater. Clifford melted out of the doorway and around the side of the house, hiding until he saw her leave. Then he went in. His father looked at him with troubled eyes.

"Evie isn't coming back."

"Gee! Isn't she, Papa?"

"Your mother had a talk with her yesterday afternoon, and she says Evie said she'd been thinking of leaving for a long time back, and she took it into her head all of a sudden that she wanted to go right then. She asked Mama to tend shop till I came back. It was because of—you know—those pictures. I never told her she had to go," Mr. Hunter said unhappily. "I kind of thought we might do something for her. Mama had this little talk with her, but I never said she couldn't stay."

CHAPTER XLVIII

EVIE had left Pine Hill, so Martha decided to forgive Clifford. She had really suffered, she had nearly cried her eyes out. I don't care what Mother Hunter says, or Clifford either, I know something happened in the woods, she told herself, for she had believed his dark guilty flush rather than his reiterated emphasized denials. With secret relief, secret even from her conscious self, she took refuge in her conviction from living with him as his wife again. But outwardly they would go on as if nothing had happened. Loving her home and her possessions, loving the dignity of marriage, shrinking from being talked about, and really trying to be good, she forgave him; unforgivingly and eternally.

She had prayed for guidance; and felt that there was One who understood how unhappy she was, and how merciful. She prayed to God to forgive Clifford, as she had forgiven him.

When she played the organ and the congregation sang:

"E'en though it be a cross,
That raiseth me:"

they seemed to be singing about her, and her eyes filled with tears. She wept at night, too, or in the twilight when honeysuckle was sweet. Everyone's happy but me, she would tell herself. What have I ever done to deserve all this misery?

She enjoyed, almost without realizing it, the melancholy interest of her sad story, and the importance it gave her in her own eyes; the warm relaxing bath of self-pity in which she soaked, at the same time that she felt jealous and resentful. He should have tried to make up to her all his life for the injury he had done her. He should have been on his knees to her.

It should have given her something to hold over Mother Hunter—that her son had behaved so. It made Martha wild to detect in Mother Hunter's attitude a slight contempt towards a woman who couldn't hold her husband. For she was sure that Mother Hunter, too, for all her pooh-poohing, believed that Clifford had been unfaithful.

Clifford, telling himself that he would not go on this way, sank back into old habits. Just for the present, he thought. Just until I make up my mind what to do.

He found he did not want death, but a new life. He saw himself in a jungle like the ones in the photographs he pored over in The National Geographic Magazine, taking moving pictures of spider-monkeys, tiny enormous-eyed lemurs, or fruit-eating bats.

Lying awake in the dark, thoughts of Evie overcame him. He tried to remember her laughing; clinging to the grapevine in her scarlet dress; or climbing the rock by the waterfall; but he could only see her crying, not covering her face.

Trying to turn from self-contempt and sorrow, to turn from the dark tangle of his heart and mind, where he was lost, he found that by lying still and not thinking he could enter his jungle. The trees rose about him, looped together by lianas, their trunks tufted with ferns and air-plants.

Lie still, and see leaves like spears and leaves like arrow-heads, leaves bigger than elephants' ears thrusting out from feathery ferns. See life so powerful that it surges from the ground, the trees, the smallest twig. Flowers have grown terrible, their stems strangle tree trunks and push through air-plants; they lift fringed cups of white and scarlet like the heads of feathered serpents. From the tree tops hang enormous cream-coloured bells, unbearably sweet. Their thick petals slip slowly through the tree-ferns, leaving long pods of shining dark brown seeds.

Lie still, and hear the roar of mounting sap, the sound that pours from every leaf and petal.

Try to hold the vision, and it is gone in a swirl of cloud, folding in on itself. But lie still, and trees pour up like rivers, their branches stream into the sky. Light

shines through yellow-green leaves, mottled as tortoise-shell; a swollen red bud opens; the petals curl back into an enormous trumpet that slowly lifts upwards.

He would jerk himself back in sudden panic to the quiet room, Martha's breathing, the ticking of the alarm clock.

By day he went on with his work. He posed Mr. Noyes in his surplice—The Churchman had asked for a picture—Mr. Cater in his Lulu fez. He stretched his mouth politely when sitters told him they always took terrible pictures; and that they would rather go to the dentist than be photographed. He showed Elsie Weismuller, engaged in Evie's place, what to do. He dodged up side roads, shaken and sick, to avoid meeting Mrs. Johnson, or Evie's brothers.

But each night he gave himself up to his visions. They grew so real that once he saw, floating down from a hidden bird to rest on a dark glossy leaf, a little feather, snow white and pale jade green.

CHAPTER XLIX

AT THE beginning of their marriage, Clifford and Martha had a quarrel over each other's mail. She was willing, anxious, to have him open her letters, why should he refuse to let her open his? He did refuse, and she hardly spoke to him for two days; two days during which the house was kept meticulously, his clothes and ties ironed, his shoes polished, while she continually shut her eyes and pressed her finger tips to her temples, to tell him how her head was aching. But he thought: suppose Cathleen should some day write to me.

She never had. His letters went on being photograph supply advertisements, book advertisements, automobile advertisements. There wasn't one that Martha couldn't have bored herself by reading. She handed them to him, held gingerly by the corners, her face averted to show that she would not even look at them. But first she had pored over the envelopes, reading address and postmark, holding to the light.

When he came home from the studio a few weeks after Evie left, Martha gave him a pale blue envelope with a crinkled silver-edged flap. He knew she was frantic with curiosity. But he wouldn't open it. He

was sure it was from Evie. His brain went numb, but he talked to Martha brightly, beamingly, pointlessly, going on without knowing what was coming next; without being able to banish the suspicious look from her face.

The telephone rang. "It's sure to be for you," she said.

"Why, no, it's always for you!" But he went.

"Ethel Brown for you, Martha. She wants to talk about the Sunday school picnic."

He ripped his letter open.

"Dear Friend Clifford,

"Just a line to tell you I am getting on fine and after all I guess it was all for the best as I was getting sick and tired of Pine Hill and was planning on leaving the hick little place sometime soon anyway ——"

"Three dozen bananas would be *am*ple," Martha cried in the hall.

"Excuse me Clifford if I say something to you but I want to say you must not blame yourself as you were not the first and anyway I am fine and dandy. But am not going to tell you where I am besides that I am in N. Y. because what is the use you would try to help me which I really do not need and probably get into a lot of trouble."

She knows me, he thought.

"There's you and myself and Mother Hunter and

Mrs. Cater and Mrs. Johnson and someone else—anyway, I know there's six cakes promised," Martha said.

"Please don't feel bad ——"

As he read, he felt sad, pitying, disillusioned; and under all the other feelings, profoundly grateful that she had not given her address, for now he need not be ashamed of himself for doing nothing.

And he thought, with relief and resentment, while Martha went on about lemons and sugar: Well, she certainly doesn't love me. I guess she's over it already. I guess I was just one of the crowd. He re-read the letter, feeling a little sick, listening apprehensively with part of his attention for Martha's voice to be still. It was all right. Evie didn't love him. She didn't even mention the word.

But through the stiff phrases—"Well Clifford I will now tell you goodbye hoping this finds you well as it leaves me"—he heard other words, broken words called to him, breathed to him, gently and wildly. He felt again her long thick eyelashes brushing his cheek. His nose and eyes smarted, he pressed his clenched fist against his mouth.

PART FOUR

CHAPTER L

"IT ISN'T that I don't understand your being so fond of nature," Martha told Clifford, screwing up her face as she concentrated on threading a needle with red silk. She was embroidering a bridge luncheon set with a pattern of playing cards. "I love nature myself, just as much as you do, and if it wasn't for my weak ankles I'd love to go on all your hikes with you. I think it's a very pleasing trait in your character, all I'm saying is I wish you'd turn it to some good account. Why *can't* you be a Scout Master, for instance, or at least just for once take the Sunday school kiddies on a nature hike? It would cheer you up. You know my motto:

'If at times you're feeling blue,
Something for someone else go do!'

But this going off by yourself, why, it's crazy! What do you *do?* Clifford, I'm talking to you. What do you *do?*"

He did not answer. He had not even heard her. He sat staring at the shining red berries of a gone-to-seed Jack-in-the-pulpit that he twirled between thumb and finger. He acts just as if he were hypnotized, she

thought; so silly and far away. Oh, dear! Can he be drinking again? "Clifford!" she cried sharply.

He looked at her dreamily.

"Clifford Hunter! Have you heard one word I've been saying? I say, what do you *do* in the woods?"

"Do?"

"Yes, *do, do, do!* You speak English, don't you? Here last night I specially made popovers because you like them, and you never came home, and you never even took the trouble to phone! And here I sat, nearly crazy, thinking something had happened to you, and all you say when you come home is, Why did you worry? My goodness! I thought I was through worrying when Papa passed on, and here it is worse than ever, just as I thought I was going to have a little happiness out of life. It isn't *fair!* Besides, even if you don't care anything about how *I* feel, which is only *too* evident, it's silly to let yourself get run down, missing your meals and staying out all night."

She looked at him again. He was so thin it made her chest ache; she had to speak sharply to keep from crying.

"For goodness' sake stop twirling that old weed and pay attention! Will you drink a glass of milk if I get it for you?"

He looked at her. "I'm sorry, Martha," he said vaguely, unhappily. She burst into tears.

The next evening he stayed away again. She waited a long time, then ate her supper. The food had a hard skin, from being kept hot in the oven. As she forced herself to swallow, her eyes filled with tears of unhappiness and self-pity.

When she had finished, she washed the dishes, set the table for breakfast, put the oatmeal on the stove, let Pussy out. Then she sat down with her embroidery; and, although he had stayed away so often lately, and always come back safely, once more irritation merged into alarm as she imagined Clifford with a broken leg in the woods—Clifford drowned in the meadow pond—or perhaps he knew where that Evie Davis was, and was with her.

At first, after long indecisions, she used to call up his mother to ask if Clifford was there. But Mother Hunter evidently thought it was funny, and her fault, that Clifford didn't stay home. Well, why hadn't Mother Hunter brought him up to act decent, instead of so selfish and wild?

Martha finished embroidering a heart card, and began a spade. Between her work and her eyes pictures floated. She saw Clifford carried in. "You must prepare yourself for a terrible shock, Mrs. Hunter." She saw herself a widow, heartbroken, brave; an appealing figure in her mourning.

A creaking in the woodwork turned her cold. In a

second she had been left dead, or worse, by a burglar. She sat as if she were frozen, her needle lifted. But no sound followed; she forced herself to work again. Then she heard footsteps outside; her heart leapt, her stomach swooned; she listened, hoping it was he, so she could be reassured and furious, fearing it was someone else.

The footsteps passed.

After awhile, late, she made herself go upstairs. She got into her nightgown, braided her hair into its wisp, put on her juliets and her kimono, and crouched, sometimes shuddering, sometimes tense, at the top of the stairs until the door opened and Clifford tip-toed in.

The first few times she had protested. But he evidently didn't care how she had worried, no matter what he said. So now she crept quickly to bed, and pretended to sleep. He should see that she, too, was indifferent. But after his breathing told her he really was asleep she cried and cried, working herself into a frenzy, waking him.

He lay rigid. Now it was he who pretended to sleep. He was sick of her, sorry for her. As her sobs died, a pointed leaf grew out of his darkness; branches lifted, and a vine's living strength pressed a tree until the branches bled with dark red flowers.

CHAPTER LI

CLIFFORD realized how much Martha did for him. She saved his money by making over her old clothes; she cooked on steaming hot days—the hotter they were, the more apt she was to put up preserves. "But you said you *liked* blackberry jam," she cried, when he protested. "It isn't for my*self* I'm doing it!" She took care of him devotedly through the bilious attacks that had shamed him from childhood. He was always being made to feel that she was making sacrifices for him, and that he should have been grateful, and he hated feeling grateful. It would be pleasanter to be the one who was unselfish, once in a while. But Martha seemed to notice no sacrifices but her own; and when he was driven to mention his occasional attempts, she would only say: "Well, why did you?" or: "I guess you wouldn't have done it if you hadn't wanted to!"

Still, I'll try to treat her better, he determined. He offered to take her to the movies one evening; but she only sighed.

He repeated the invitation.

"Oh, you go if you're so set on it. I'm too tired."

"Well, would you like me to read to you?"

"I thought you wanted to go to the movies."

"No, I want to do whatever you like."

"Since when, please?"

"This story in The Saturday Evening Post looks good."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, go to your movies!"

"I don't want to, Martha. Let me read to you."

"Oh, all right! Only you'll have to wait a minute."

She left the room, and his thoughts drifted away, to be brought back by the slam of the cellar door, the crash of coal being poured into the stove.

"Martha! Why didn't you ask me to get the coal?"

She only gasped, and pressed her hand to her side.

"I'd have gotten it——"

She laughed shortly. "Well, go on with your story. Is it very long?"

He began to read aloud. From the words his mind dove under, into dark depths. He planned his murder of her. She was asleep; he put first the chloroform over her face, and then the pillow. She was always saying her heart was weak, and getting her own way by it. Next morning she would be found dead in bed, and that was all. He saw her pink nose rising from the coffin—no, it would be white, and her glasses would be off. No one would ever guess, and he would be free as air. He reached the surface after the long dive; his voice was still reading, he didn't know what. Evidently he had gone on. Martha was placidly sewing. He sud-

denly felt quite warmly towards her, as if he had saved her life.

"Well, is *that* your idea of an interesting story?" she asked. "I don't think much of it!"

But at bedtime she brought him a glass of milk, and stood beside him while he drank it. They looked at each other with eyes that mutually asked forgiveness.

But she no longer really mattered to him. She had become a shadow. He kept out of her way as much as possible, only because she interfered with his trying to remember something wonderful—something that would make everything clear—that he had known once, and forgotten.

Sometimes while he was working, he would almost remember. He would stand still, hardly breathing. That was what happened on the day he let the running water overflow the studio sink, and, trying to mop it up, knocked over a pile of photographic plates, and broke them.

Squatting in the mess, he put his head down on his arm and began to cry.

His father heard the crash and came in. He squatted on the floor beside Clifford, and put his arm around him.

"Oh, Papa; what's the matter with me?"

His father patted him awkwardly.

"I'll help you clean up this mess."

"I wanted you to be proud of me, and look at me!

What's the matter with me, Papa? My painting that I thought was going to be so wonderful, look at it! Look at what I've done to Evie, and Martha. I'm just no good, and I don't know how to be different——"

He held his arm in front of his wet eyes, childish plumes of hair stuck up from the crown of his head. Loving him, wanting terribly to help him, his father went on patting.

"You're just nervous and run down. You're all right, Clifford. You're all right! How about a little holiday? I could manage fine, there isn't much to do just now. I'll treat you to a little trip somewhere, and when you come back you'll be fine!"

Clifford gulped, and scrubbed his eyes.

"You've done too much for me already. I guess I'll be all right. I don't know what got into me."

"Anyway, take a day off now and then, this nice fall weather. That'll make you feel better. I notice the leaves are getting very pretty, nice and red."

CHAPTER LII

THE ladies of Pine Hill prided themselves on their love of nature. With celluloid parakeets swaying in their automobile windows, and muslin cherry blossoms quivering in their automobile vases, they drove to nature talks at the Woman's Club. J. Horace Seely spoke on "Birds in Their Relation to Injurious Insects," Mrs. Noyes started a "Save the Wildflowers Campaign" among the school children, and many of the ladies looked at the pictures of sea-gulls, frost crystals, and desert flora in The National Geographic Magazine, and meant to read the articles. But they agreed with each other that while it was nice to love the out-of-doors, it was quite a different thing to let yourself go absolutely insane about it, like Clifford Hunter.

People met him miles from home, plodding along as if he were pulled by an invisible rope. Sometimes he was talking to himself, and laughing. But when Mr. Noyes in Araminta the Ford met him over beyond the mushroom meadow, tears were pouring down his face. Mr. Noyes offered him a lift, but got no answer. He told Mrs. Noyes, but told her not to tell, and she certainly told Mrs. Johnson not to repeat it. "Does any-

one know what *really* became of Evie Davis?" Mrs. Johnson questioned; and added a musing: "Hmm."

Some people said it was dreadful that Clifford Hunter had taken to drinking; others, more charitable, considered it unkind to say such a thing, when everyone knew he had always been queer. Now that his queerness was increasing, it would be kinder to him if he were kept from wandering around. They were sorry for his mother, and Martha; but pleased, of course, too.

Some little boys saw him in the woods, running, jumping, flinging his arms around the trees. He was singing and shouting. Then he threw himself down in a bed of ferns, and rolled. The boys ran all the way home. But that evening some of them saw him sedately sitting with his wife at an illustrated lecture on the Holy Land, in the Sunday school room.

Clifford felt that there was no human companionship for him anywhere.

He would know his fear was beginning again, the world was withdrawing, to leave him alone, insane with terror, in eternity, in infinity. And he would fly to the woods that drew him, sucking him into darkness. His stumbling feet made no sound, he cast no shadow. Running his hands up the rough trunk of a tree, pressing his face close against it, he was safe again, the ground grew firm beneath him, he was made alive by wind and water.

Cathleen had once lent him a book of mythology, in

which, over and over again, mortals who loved nature too well, who looked too close, were destroyed. The light from her naked loveliness was too bright for their eyes, and they died. The stories were wrong, all wrong, he had thought, although, since Cathleen approved of them, he had been too polite to say so. Now he felt even more deeply that life was the gift nature gave to her lovers, not death.

More and more he saw things move. Tendrils writhed slightly, slowly; sometimes a rock changed its shape as he watched, almost imperceptibly, like a grey cloud in a windless sky. And voices spoke, he thought; he would answer quickly.

One sunny morning in the late autumn he went to the woods. The deep murmur that filled them in summer had given place to a finer, sharper music of rustling leaf and crackling twig, through which he heard clearly the bell of the Episcopal church ringing for morning service. Each vibration spread until the new stroke drowned it; and, as the bell rocked to rest, the last little unintended note hummed faintly on the still air for a long time.

Here a crimson fan of dogwood, there a trail of scarlet Virginia creeper, warmed the woods; and the tips of bushes bent with the weight of blue and coral berries. The smell of frost and dead leaves filled him with bliss, he crouched down and lifted a handful of dead leaves and mould to his face. Happiness mounted like a wave,

broke over him. Time ceased, he was drenched in radiance.

When the high tension of ecstasy broke, he lay half-fainting, sinking into peace. Peace sounded from the stream, surrounded each leaf, each straw-coloured fern-frond, like air.

Newly born, buoyant, empty of thought, he followed the stream above the waterfall for miles. He tasted and spat out small sour wild grapes; he watched the squirrels ripple along the branches, sit up to twirl pine cones in their tiny hands, or flatten themselves on the tree-trunks. He came to the mushroom meadow, and paused under the shellbark trees that edged it, to fill his pockets with nuts. Loitering home by a long way, in order to pass the black branches of vermilion persimmons, he heard again from the valley the bell of Holy Trinity, now ringing for afternoon service. He could see the small church, among its tombstones, swallowing a few dark specks. It made him laugh out loud to think that each speck was a person, feeling important.

He bent down and began to pull the burrs from his trousers—small green hedgehogs from the burdocks and tiny dark harpoons from the tickweed. They clung to each other, to the cloth, to his fingers; and finally he let them stay, crammed a persimmon, sweet and pulpy with frost, into his mouth, and spat out the seed.

Behind the church and its graves the sky was red. He

came down the hill as the wind comes, rushing and light, but it was a long way, and when he reached the village lights were coming on. In the memorial window of Holy Trinity, Jesus appeared in white, suffering little children in magenta and Prussian blue to come to Him. The lights from the other windows made the graveyard dark. Running past the open door, Clifford heard a hymn, a thin determined scream, for only a few people came to evensong.

"Soon, for me, the light of day
Shall forever pass away——"

And then he was past, and at his father's house, where in the yard Mr. Hunter was burning weeds, his eyes watering from the smoke that curled slowly sideways and up in thick yellow folds. Turning away to wipe his spectacles, he looked into Clifford's eyes, shining and ecstatic.

"Papa! I just stopped to tell you something. The funniest thing has happened. You know how miserable I was? Well, it's all gone! I don't know why, but I'm perfectly happy—everything's all right now. You know when I was so upset and everything, the trouble was I'd gotten it into my head that maybe I was going crazy or something, but now it's all right. You won't have to worry about me any more. I'm perfectly happy!"

CHAPTER LIII

HIS joy continued, lifting him up and away from the things that had troubled him. The voices he heard were not the voices of Martha and his mother, though he tried to pay attention, to be kind and good, as he had tried to be good when he was a little boy and Christmas was coming; promising everything, and too excited to remember his promises.

He could hardly bear to sleep, to lose consciousness of his rapture. Sitting with Martha, hearing that Pussy had jumped up on the kitchen table and dragged off what was left of the chicken; that Ethel Brown was getting a fur coat; and Mrs. Johnson had sprained her ankle going down cellar for pears for a pie, Martha's voice would grow small as a cricket's cry, the walls would swirl and melt like mist, and he would be away where the wet dead tree trunks, softly black as soot, were patched with intensely green moss, and bright violet fungi, with markings like tide-marks on sand, swelled in the cold rain.

Rain turned to snow, and he remembered the magnified photographs of snowflakes Mr. Simpson had shown him, and realized, fleetingly, but long enough to be scornful and pitying of those who did not, that the

air was full of stars, each made of six tiny pine trees, or six ferns, or six flowers; that the earth was piled deep with unseen miracles, complained of by Martha, who had to put on her zipper galoshes.

Seed-pods and flower-heads in the meadow, that had been dark through the shivering rain-like slant of straw-coloured wind-blown grass, turned to clustered crystals; ice-encased grasses bent, loop after loop, in a pattern of waves. Pond and brook were crystal, and ferns along the bank; there were other ferns, that grew from no roots, in frost and ice.

"The colour of the terrible crystal," he had read to his grandfather, and now he saw it when the sun struck ice and snow, in sparkles and flakes, blue, violet, green and red. But deep in the woods the pine trees stood so close together that only a silvery dust sifted through.

One night the wind screamed and shook the house. Clifford and Martha, indoors, heard the rip and clash as a sleet-laden branch was torn from a tree. Then the wind drew back, sobbing; drew far away, to leap on the house and wrench at the trees again.

The storm was so bad that Martha began to take a solemn excited pride in it. "It's a *ter*rible night!" she told Clifford. "Listen! Hear the sleet!"

He was painting a poster for the Methodist Cake Bake. He put his brush between his lips to point it, and then carefully coloured holly berries, leaving a high

light of white on each. But he had to keep stopping, Martha had to keep putting down the sock she was darning. They looked at each other with shining important eyes, saying: "Listen to that!"

She finished the socks, and came behind him.

"Oh! Are you painting *holly*?"

"Any objections?"

"But why don't you paint something a little more original, dear?"

"Such as?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't pretend to be artistic. Anything except holly, that's been used *so* much. Just something Christmasy and unusual, that gives the idea of a cake bake. I'm afraid the ladies will be disappointed if you just do a holly border."

"All right. Let them do it themselves."

"Now, Clifford, don't be so touchy!"

"I'm *not* touchy!"

"I don't know what you call it, throwing down your brush and getting impatient *simply* because I ask you if you think holly is very original. Now don't be silly. Go ahead and finish the poster. It's *perfectly* good enough for them."

She piled the socks in her darning basket, and went upstairs for the apron she was appliquéing for Mother Hunter's Christmas present. When she came down Clifford was not in the room. His paintbrush lay on

the poster, trailing a little pink puddle. "Tchk!" she exclaimed, blotting it up. There was his tumbler of water, green from the paint for holly leaves; his cigarette, smoking itself in the ash-tray. She crushed that out, wrinkling her nose. She thought he had gone to the kitchen, or up to the bathroom. She shook out a shower of cretonne roses, and began to sew.

The fire stirred and fell. Pussy yawned delicately, stretched, curled round, and went to sleep. And slowly Martha realized that Clifford was not in the house; the atmosphere changed, grew charged and tense. "Clifford!" she called; then, gathering a lapful of sewing, went to the foot of the stairs, and called again.

She could not settle down. She wandered from room to room, she picked up a magazine. Then she went to the piano, and began to play.

She had read in some program notes that Mendelssohn had meant this scherzo to sound like fairies ringing the bells of flowers, and the fancy had charmed her. But now the crying wind, the splinter and chime of falling ice, disturbed her, so that she could not go on neatly tapping out delicate tinkles. She put her face down in her hands. She used to imagine being married to Clifford, and playing the piano in the evening; she had wished for it more than anything in the world.

Well, she had her wish.

CHAPTER LIV

CLIFFORD had meant to go out for only a minute, while Martha was upstairs; to be back painting holly when she came down again. But the rhythm of the storm made him part of itself; he yielded to it, and was led on and on. Drawn by the wind and blinded by the sleet, he felt himself swoop high above the world, so swiftly he lost his breath. Then he was close to earth again, he brushed through the tops of the pines. Snowy hills reeled away, waterfalls turned as he flew over them, the whole world was visibly, swiftly turning.

Sometimes he felt so great that the pine woods were moss at his feet, sometimes so small that the moss was a forest above him. He shouted at the top of his lungs, but his voice was blown away like smoke.

He slipped and fell on the sleety ground; knew, when he got up, that he was nearly exhausted, and began to fight his way home with solid iron feet that were no longer part of him. He saw warm little pictures of the fire, of a steaming cup; he remembered that it was Saturday night, and the sheets of his bed would be fresh and smooth.

Home again, soaked and nearly frozen, he huddled against the stove, his wet shoes steaming. It glowed

red, but he could feel no warmth; his teeth chattered, he shook as if he would shake to pieces, in spite of the hot milk Martha gave him, when she came down, scolding and making an outcry, so angry at him, so sorry for him. Surges of deathly cold rose within him, jerking and wrenching him. His temples looked sunken and greyish-blue, and his nose greyish-blue and pinched. His hands were jerking so that the milk splashed out and scalded Martha's wrist. He kept trying to smile and show her everything was all right, but his teeth were chattering so that he could not. It made her chest ache and her eyes smart; she was cross, to reassure herself and him.

"You must be stark staring crazy, going out a night like this!" she scolded, down on her knees, tugging at his wet shoes. "Stop shaking, Clifford! You can if you will! Drink that while it's hot. Don't *let* yourself shake that way!"

She got him to bed, with the hot water bag at his feet. A humming cloud was around him, that gathered into smothering darkness, filling his eyes and ears and lungs.

CHAPTER LV

MARTHA nursed Clifford in a glow of goodness, importance, and anxiety. He needed her at last; and when she had to rest, leaving his mother beside him, she was jealous. She wanted to do it all, if it killed her.

No matter how exhausted she was, she would pray before lying down; often she fell asleep on her knees. Where father and husband had failed her, God gave her protection and love, knew how hard she had tried to be good, understood all her troubles. Thou, God, seest me. As Papa never did, or Clifford, or Mother Hunter. And she felt she was His "Whom, having not seen, ye loved ——"

"You're being perfectly ridiculous, Martha," Mrs. Hunter scolded; for she was jealous, too. Clifford was hers. She wanted to take all the care of him. She understood him.

Sitting beside him, bathing his poor burning face, she saw him a little boy again. "Clifford, are you listening to Mama? Do you hear what Mama's telling you?" But he only wanted to get away. Always to get away to the woods. He seemed so young to be allowed to go alone. She would go up to her room, where she

had been able to watch him from the window until the Browns built their house. She could see him now, running across the field, holding out his arms, as if he were hurrying to someone. He was so small that only his head and his outstretched arms showed above the daisies and tall grass. Sometimes he tripped and fell, but then he scrambled up and hurried on.

So long ago, and it seemed like yesterday.

She must stop crying. She wiped her eyes impatiently as Martha came in.

"I'll stay with him now, Mother Hunter."

"Nonsense! You haven't had any rest at all!"

"I've had all I want."

"Martha, you're acting crazy! You can't go on this way; you're absolutely green already, and great pockets under your eyes!"

But Martha was filled with exaltation. She would do as she pleased, smiling and stubborn. Clifford was hers.

Upstairs, in the orderly room, she was tireless; taking Clifford's temperature, giving him milk, and gently forcing him down when, over and over, he tried to get out of bed. But downstairs she could admit exhaustion, holding her whirling head; too tired to care about the snow sympathizers tracked into the house; just able to find a faint pleasure in their solemn-voiced comments on her pallor and devotion. "Everybody's being won-

derful," she murmured. For there was hardly a person in Pine Hill who had not asked: "Is there anything I can do?" and Mrs. Johnson was being so kind that it almost took one person's time to answer her telephoned inquiries. She had unexpectedly sent a dozen and a half carnations. Martha was both pleased and annoyed. Clifford seemed perfectly reasonable when she showed them to him. But then he kept struggling up in bed to say to an empty doorway: "Thank you for the carnations."

For Mrs. Johnson was always coming to him. He would see her peering from behind a tree, or catch a glimpse of her through the waving dark.

Something was pushing up through the floor. A white toadstool blotched with red. He lay watching the hat-shaped top, the bulge beneath. It swelled to the size of a human being, it folded small hands over the bulge of stomach, and trotted crouching around the room. A little talking mouth opened. It bent over his bed. Talk, talk, talk! A tiny stinging voice. He struck it, and it split softly, melted into an inky pool. But there was another; another. They pushed up everywhere, white blotched with red, their little mouths filled the room with hurting sound. They had seen him with Evie in the woods, and were telling about it. He started up in bed to try to break them, but hands spread over him, shutting out the light. Fingers curved like roots of

trees, stretched out, grew huge, slowly descended, pushing him down into spreading circles of grey; pale silvery light, moving in a slow whirlpool, darkening and deepening to the center, that sucked him down its funnel mouth. Then came the blinding, roaring smother of the waterfall pouring over him. He fought out from under it, and could breathe; then hands pushed him down again. If he could get away from those hands, to the pool below the waterfall, and float and turn in the cool water, he would be all right. But the hands grew, curved, descended; pushed him down. Grey circles closed over him.

The muffling darkness thinned. He was in the woods. The earth was heaving, then blunt points pushed through, rising, wrapped in green sheaths, to pierce heaven as well as earth, before they burst softly into flowers with petals that spread and glowed, petals of vermilion, pink, and crimson flame; leaves that melted into the air in drops of green fire.

They were so beautiful that his eyes filled with tears. As he gazed at the trees they trembled; they were distorted as trees reflected in moving water; they spread and vanished.

"He's always trying to get out of bed, doctor," Martha said.

"You'll just have to watch him, and keep him as quiet as you can. Keep the icebag on his head."

Voices from darkness. He cried to Cathleen in terror. Give me your hand to hold in the dark, my darling!

Something cold on his head, something cold and wet trickling down his face. Snow in his face. Snow in deep ridges on the roofs, piling on the window sills, clicking softly against the windows. So light and white that he caught up handfuls and ate it. He could use the new sled Papa had given him. It was painted bright green, and named Skimmer. It zig-zagged behind him on its rope. He could smell the pure freshness of snow.

No, he was in bed, although it must be past time to get up. God's angels looked in at the window. Their snowy wings stirred and flashed, they beckoned him to come out, until Martha frightened them away.

Trees and bushes were deep with snow. The sun on the snow will hurt his eyes, Martha thought, as she pulled down the shades.

He saw people, sometimes his mother's face, sometimes Martha's; a hand, a mouth. People thickly transparent as smoke, or brightly coloured, with light shining through, like the slides of his old magic lantern, or the windows of Holy Trinity when the lights were lit inside. They melted into each other, floated across the ceiling, undulated through folds of curtains, swelled around furniture. Sometimes they looked so funny

that he had to laugh. Martha in magenta solemnly riding an old grey goose; Mrs. Johnson in poison green, with a fly on the end of her long red nose. Snatches of talk that he strained to understand drifted about him; whispers, lost in a loud dull humming, out of which the sound of water grew. Cool green water washing over a girl's white body, that was sinking, never to be seen again. He tried to call to her in time, but she was gone.

"Cathleen, I love you too dearly!"

Martha, dozing beside him, awoke at his cry.

"Yes, dear! Right here. Do you want me?"

The flowered bed-spread lay heavy over him. He thought, I am dead. He could not move, he lay in his narrow grave.

But the Day of Resurrection came. He sat up in his grave, pushed up the coverlet of grass and flowers. Grass and flowers rose, tombstones cracked. Mr. Simpson rose, pushing aside granite and periwinkle; he sat up in his grave wearing his silk skull cap; his long green beard flowed down. Grampa rose in his nightgown, holding the tables of the law. There was a white light too bright to bear, that was God.

Martha rose from the dead beside him. Husband and wife, they had lain side by side under the silky white tangle of grass roots, the firm brown threads of daisy roots, until now they rose together. Her dark robes

split like cracking earth to show a white robe of glory, and the dazed look on her face was the look of the dead awaking.

But she forced him back into his grave, she covered him again with grass and flowers.

CHAPTER LVI

EVERYONE was sorry for poor Mr. Hunter, of course, but he was in the way. He knew he was, he tried not to be. He didn't want to make more work, and when Dr. Reed said it was better for Clifford not to have people coming in to the room, he did not ask to see him again. But he was always down in the hall. There he sat on the hard fumed-oak hall chair, his hands folding and folding a piece of paper, straining to hear what was going on upstairs. When his wife or Martha or Dr. Reed came down, he would jump up, standing with ruffled forehead and pleading, frightened eyes, waiting in silence for what they chose to tell him.

People were bright and kind, mutedly lilting their optimistic encouragement. He would say "Thank you," but they got a little discouraged trying to cheer up Mr. Hunter. Mrs. Hunter and Martha were thankful when they had something for him to do; when they could send him to the drug-store for a prescription, or to Hamilton for a bed-pan. He was thankful, too.

But the things he brought back! Tired and anxious as they were, the two women had to smile at each other, shaking their heads. Fruits and flowers that they could not bear to tell him Clifford was too ill to eat or see.

And so expensive at this time of year! But Mrs. Hunter could not bring herself to speak of that. Indeed, she found that if it comforted Elbert the least little bit, she didn't care.

Once he asked Martha if Clifford had liked the grapes. It made her wish that lying wasn't wicked. It was almost a lie to answer: "He hasn't eaten them *yet,*" as if he were going to.

One day Mrs. Hunter came down to find him sitting in the hall, still in his rubbers and overcoat, with his nose red and running, holding a florist's box. He pushed it toward her mutely.

"*You* open it, Elbert," she said. For, goodness, *any*thing to give him something to do! "Find a nice vase and put them in."

His fingers shook and jerked as he tried to untie the string, and he got most of the water from the tap up his sleeve. It troubled Ethel Brown to have him take one of the pair of mantel vases. Would Martha like it? She brought him another from the china closet.

"Suppose we put the roses in *this,* Mr. Hunter. Shall we? I think they'd look just lovely in this one."

He would have liked to point out to Clifford the silvery light on the red petals; their deep June fragrance. He handed them to Martha, going upstairs. "I thought he might like them—they look kind of velvety——" And Martha answered in a voice hoarse with weariness:

"Why, they're *lovely*, Father Hunter! I'm sure they'll do him just *lots* of good!"

His wife's sister Ida had come from Baltimore to take care of Elbert while Anna was so busy with Clifford. Poor Ida, homesick for Frank and the children, her house, her club, her church, struggled to cheer him. At each dreaded meal she tried to take his mind off Clifford's illness.

"Well, Elbert! Still snowy, I see."

"Yes." And after a long pause: "Still snowy."

"But I've been reading about Byrd's expedition, and I guess compared to *them* we don't know what snow is! Just think of *flying* to the South Pole! We certainly are living in a wonderful age, as Frank often says. Radio, too. When you come to think of it, it's almost like magic, isn't it? Speaking of the radio, I see there's a very good program tonight. There's some lovely music, and a boxing match, I know you men like that. Frank certainly does, anyway. What say we have a nice little concert after supper?"

"Well—I kind of thought I'd go over to Clifford's."

"Now, Elbert, it's a mean night and you have a cold already. We don't want *two* invalids on our hands, *do* we? You know they promised they'd call up if there was the least little bit of a change, and you told me yourself Dr. Reed was very encouraging today."

"I know. But that might mean——"

He drifted into one of his long pauses, that always made her nervous. She leaned forward to straighten the fern dish, and her glasses clattered to her plate. Not broken, thank goodness, but all over gravy. Wiping them, she saw that he had hardly touched his supper.

"Now, Elbert, eat some of that nice stew, or you'll hurt my feelings!"

Slowly, obediently, he began to eat. "That might mean that maybe I'd be able to see him."

"Mercy, no, not at *night!* You know they have to keep him very quiet so's he'll sleep, and if he knew you were downstairs fretting, that might worry him. We don't want to do *that, do* we? But I shouldn't wonder a bit if you could see him tomorrow, or anyway real soon."

What were Frank and the children doing now? Sometimes she felt as if she never would see them again.

Elbert was taking so long, lifting his fork so slowly, that she wanted to scream, but instead she brightly produced another of the items she had been saving.

"I was reading in the paper today that Mrs. Calvin Coolidge is very partial to roses, and do you know what I said to myself? I said, my! I just wish she could see Elbert's rose beds in the summer!"

And now what could she talk about?

"I'll just slip out and get dessert while you're finishing. Now, take your time! Don't hurry."

In the kitchen she leaned against the wall, closed her

eyes, and flapped her hands feebly from the wrists. Then she caught up her pie, and hurried back.

"See what I baked. A lovely lemon meringue pie! Anna said you liked them. Don't it look good, if I do say so myself? Frank's the greatest one for lemon pie, too. I tell you what let's do after supper, let's have a nice game of double dummy four hundred. That's a challenge!"

Supper was over at last. She blew the crumbs from her brown silk bosom, and began to stack the dishes. She wouldn't wash them until morning, for if she left him alone he'd be off like a shot to Clifford's, and Anna had implored her to keep him from under foot. "You be getting out the cards!" she called.

But when she came he was looking at some water colours. "See, Ida," he said. "I found these when I went to look for the cards. Clifford did them when he was a little boy. Look, this is Jonah and the whale."

Ida pinched her glasses more firmly on her nose, and looked. The whale swam in a scalloped dark blue sea, and Jonah, with a head shaped like a lima bean, was half out of its mouth. They both had pleasant, cordial expressions. "Well!" said Ida, strangling a yawn, for she was tired.

"Here's some more. I kept them all. They're good for a little boy, I think, don't you?"

A tiger, vermilion striped with black, standing on

four clothes-pin legs under a smudged green feather-duster of a palm tree. A dirty daffodil. A volcano erupting in scarlet streaks. An autumn leaf.

"That red maple leaf he did at school. See, his teacher wrote V. G. on it. That means very good. He was always painting. I don't know why he's given it up, his work got some very fine compliments from New York art editors, and that means something."

"My, yes, indeed! I guess art editors aren't very free with their compliments! I don't know much about art, but I always thought Clifford's paintings were just splendid!"

"It's a pity he's given it up. I'm going to try to start him at it again when he gets well. That boy's got real talent, Ida. He's going to do something fine one of these days. I know some people think I've been too easy with him, but the way I figured was: you can't treat an artist the way you would an ordinary person. I used to think I'd like to paint, myself, but it never amounted to anything. But Clifford, now, he's got real talent. I could see it even when he was little."

He put the pictures away, thinking of Clifford as a child. He had thought of him as a child so often lately, while he trudged through the snow, or waited on the hall chair. He remembered a day when he was standing under the cherry tree in full bloom. The red-brown satiny bark, with its long white dashes, was so smooth

that he always had to draw his hands slowly around it. He was doing that when Clifford came tumbling down the steps and across the grass to him. Something had gone wrong for the little boy. There were tears on his lashes, and tear stains on the red cheeks, as well as crumbs and buttery sugar. They stood together looking up at the light coming through the bunches of white blossoms, the bees curving about them with a deep contented droning. Clifford began to stroke the bark as his father was doing. Because his father was standing with legs wide apart, Clifford tried to stand like him. The father looked down at his little boy, and Clifford put his head back to look up, and suddenly smiled all over his face.

The cherry tree had died, and been cut down, and there was a tub of snow on its stump now, that in summer was a tub of nasturtiums. But he was standing under it again with his little boy. It wasn't much to remember, and yet he kept seeing it.

He was seeing it next day when Dr. Reed came downstairs really smiling.

"Well, Elbert, the patient's a lot better today."

Mr. Hunter looked up, face shining, looked down, his mouth jerking under his moustache, took off his spectacles, and polished them.

"I was telling Martha a little icecream wouldn't hurt him."

"I'll go get some!" Mr. Hunter beamed, struggling into his overcoat.

It was a glorious day. The sky was blue as a robin's egg, and though the snow was still deep, it was melting. His galoshes left deep grey transparent prints. The snow slipped from bowed-down bushes, they sprang up with a prancing freedom. It flopped from the roofs of the old houses, that looked gay and fantastic with their wooden lace work and leafless vines. Rainbowed icicles were dripping, pitting the soft snow beneath them, and now and then falling, chiming. He was sure he could smell spring.

He carried his cardboard box back from the drug-store, pausing to pat every dog, to stop every passerby and say: "Clifford's better!"

CHAPTER LVII

CLIFFORD was better. Mrs. Hunter and Martha relaxed, began to realize their exhaustion. "Sure you don't want me to stay with him tonight?" Mrs. Hunter asked through convulsive yawns; and Martha, yawning too, but remembering to pat her mouth and gasp: "Pardon!" answered: "You go home and get a good rest, Mother Hunter. Tonight will be easy. He's as quiet as a lamb."

Oh, she was tired! Sinking into the soft armchair in the warm dimly-lighted room, she admitted to herself that she was so tired she was almost dead. Wonderful to have the strain of watching lessened. She fell deeply asleep.

Darkness lifted, and Clifford lay quietly looking at the quiet room, seeing everything as if it had been cut out with sharp scissors. The shaded lamp, with a paper pinned on it to shield his eyes, sent an arc of light over the wall. He was in a bower of hard and scentless roses.

Martha was asleep in the fat rosy armchair that was sleeping, too. The bed was asleep, breathing quietly beneath him. Now he could get away, and go to the woods. If he could lie down alone in his quiet cave

he would be well again. "O then to the Rock let me fly," he sang, but silently, for he must be careful not to wake the sleeping room.

He got up slowly. With his eyes on Martha, he sensibly put on his Kozy Kumfort slippers and his warm dressing-gown. He paused to listen on each step of the stairs. The front door closed behind him as quietly as a dream.

The windless night was full of falling snow. The cold wet flakes floated gently against his burning face, he trod on down. He sucked in mouthfuls of pure air, he was so happy that tears poured down his cheeks. Warmed by fever, he felt himself floating as lightly, as easily as a snowflake.

The trees came to meet him through the snow. A blur took shape, a pine tree drew him past, and was hidden in flying white. Another was at hand, to draw him on. But everything behind him, before him, was lost. He was alone with happiness.

The woods were filled with the singing and sighing of pines. Your waterfall waits for you. Your dark cave waits.

He stumbled over the trailing cord of his dressing-gown, but he could not stop to tie it. The trees drew him from one to another. He only had to give himself up to them.

But his knees sagged, and he pitched forward, into

bushes that let him down gently on to the softness of snow-piled moss. He was content to rest a little while, before he went on. He lay quietly in the silently falling snow, warm, sleepy, falling asleep in a stillness of joy.

CHAPTER LVIII

"THE great excitement here is Clifford Hunter's disappearance," Miss King wrote to Cathleen, spending the winter in Florida. "You know I told you he had pneumonia, and last night, while everyone was asleep, he managed to get out of the house while he was delirious, poor boy, and has simply vanished. Of course all the men in the place, from Mr. Noyes to La Vergne Davis, are hunting for him, but so far not a trace has been found, as it was snowing hard all night —it still is—and of course that covered his tracks. Mr. Noyes has arranged to have our church bell rung when he is found, to let the searchers know, and tolled if he is dead. He can hardly be anything else, poor soul, in this weather."

Mrs. Hunter, her face swollen, tears never stopping, was wonderful, people told each other. She had searched with the men, and then she came back and made coffee, and took it out in thermos bottles; carried out blankets; and even hunted up La Vergne Davis and got a bottle of whiskey.

Martha knelt in her room, with Mr. McGrath until he went out to join the search, then alone, praying with a shining face. Ethel Brown tiptoed in with a cup of tea,

and came out crying. "She's wonderful!" she sobbed. "When I gave her the tea she actually said: 'Thank you, Ethel dear.' She says she knows God will let them find Clifford. I think she's a perfect *saint!*"

"If they *don't* find him, I shouldn't think she'd ever be able to forgive herself. I don't mean anyone else would blame her, but I know if it was me I'd never get over it."

"Well, I know what you mean, Mrs. Cater, but she was just worn out, and they all thought the danger was over. Still, of course, I do know what you mean."

And she almost heard a voice saying: Ethel is the most understanding person! She sees everyone's point of view; she's wonderful that way.

"I wonder what his mother thinks about it," said Mrs. Mittendorf. "If someone had let a thing like that happen to Earl, seems if I'd find it pretty hard to forgive them."

Ethel had a sudden vision of Earl, desperately ill; herself watching beside him. "Well, I just feel heartbroken for poor Martha," she said. "But of course I'm pretty sure that if *I'd* been taking care of—of Clifford——"

"*Poor* Clifford!"

"Yes, indeed, *poor* Clifford, I just *could*n't have gone to sleep, if I was dying for it. Poor Martha!"

"Poor Mrs. Hunter!" said Mrs. Mittendorf. "I hope

she doesn't blame herself too much for having gone home. It seems to me if it had been me I just *could*n't have left my own son when there was the *slight*est danger. Of course I don't mean anyone could blame either of them, only I was thinking how I'd feel about it if it had happened to me."

Mrs. Johnson was so sorry for everyone. If he was found too late—and what other way could he be found in this bitter weather, poor boy?—she would send a wreath on an easel, with a purple ribbon across it, saying "At Rest," like the one the lodge had sent her husband when he died.

She kept open house for the searchers, with coffee and sandwiches ready. Everyone was kind, sorry, and full of dreadful excited happiness. The men gathered in Mrs. Johnson's kitchen, stamping off the snow and throwing their arms around themselves.

"Any news?" the women asked, pouring out coffee.

"Nope. Not a sign."

"Not a sign. Well, sir, looks bad."

"Yes sirree! Looks pretty bad. Don't look like there was a chance for him, poor fellow."

"Not a chance, weather like this."

"Oh, dear, isn't it awful? My heart just *aches* for poor Mrs. Hunter and Martha! Elsie, call up the store —no, I guess you better run over—Papa and the boys

are still out looking—and get a couple more loaves of sandwich bread. Wrap up good, now."

"Have some more coffee before you go out again, Mr. McGrath. It's perishing out, colder than ever now it's stopped snowing. Poor Clifford! How Martha must be feeling! She was the one was with him when he got away."

"Well, she was worn out, you can't blame her."

"Mercy, no! Only I was thinking if it was me, I'd never forgive myself."

"Light the lights, Mrs. McGrath, it's getting dark."

"Well, we better be at it again." The men finished their coffee, wiped their mouths, struggled into coats, and plunged out into the cold. "Feel that!" the women cried to each other, beginning to wash the dishes, going now and then to press against the window, to watch the lanterns moving through meadows and woods.

When the others gave up for a time, and went back, cold and exhausted, to warmth and hot coffee and excited, important, solemn talkings over, Mr. Hunter kept on, a round ball of a man in his great-coat and muffler. His head was down like an old hunting-dog. His breath froze on his moustache. When they tried to get him to rest he shook off their hands, he did not answer. But every now and then he called: "Clifford!"

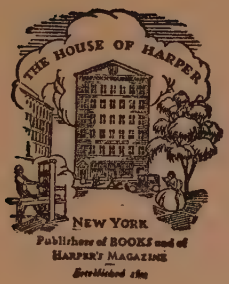
He did not know where he was going. He was blind

with tears. Sometimes he took off his spectacles and scrubbed his eyes with the back of his mitten, and then he could see the circle of light from his lantern bob over the snow, climb a snow-plastered tree-trunk. He was alone, too far from the others to hear them calling to each other. He plodded on.

The sun had risen, pink on the snow, when he came out on the hill above the village. His lantern was still burning, but its flame was almost invisible in the radiant light.

Then through the still air swelled the first heavy note of the tolling bell. He dropped the lantern, it went out.

THE END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